

INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS OF 1998 YOUTH ATTITUDE TRACKING STUDY RESPONDENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) began in 1975 as a relatively modest telephone survey of young men aged 16-21. It grew into a complex annual telephone survey of 10,000 young men and women 16-24 years of age. One of the primary objectives of the YATS project was to assess the propensity of young men and women to join the military. The YATS data has provided a reliable measure of patterns in youth attitudes toward the military and the characteristics of those who were likely to join and those who were unlikely to join. One of the limitations of this large scale study, however, was its inability to explore the complex factors that may underlie or explain any observed differences in the youth population.

Beginning in 1995, a series of in-depth studies of YATS respondents was initiated to increase understanding of youth propensity for military service. To date, these studies have focused on two broad areas of inquiry—career decision-making among different segments of the youth population, and circumstances affecting propensity for military service. *Interviews With Parents of 1998 Youth Attitude Tracking Respondents* was conducted in 1999 and was the first effort to collect information from parents.

The rationale for this study of parents stems from two interrelated issues—declining trends in meeting recruitment goals among the various Services (GAO, February 24, 2000) and evidence from youth that parents influence their career decision-making (Lehnus, 1995; Nieva, *et al.*, 1995). To investigate these issues, the study was designed to answer four broad research questions. These were:

- How do parents describe their sons' approaches or plans for the future?
- What roles do parents say they play in their sons' career decision-making?
- What images or opinions do parents have of the military? What images or opinions of the military do parents communicate to their sons?
- How do parents view their sons' propensity for military service? What do they see as the benefits and drawbacks of military service for their sons?

To answer these questions, 96 parents of sons between the ages of 16 and 22 who participated in the 1998 YATS survey were interviewed for this study. Sampling procedures were used to select approximately equal numbers of parents along the dimensions of gender, race/ethnicity, veteran status, sons' aptitudes for math, and sons' propensity for military service. The intent was to select a sufficient number of parents along each of these dimensions to assess similarities and differences within and across them.

It is important to note that the analysis is of a small number of parents and the findings are not presented as generalized estimates of the characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of the population. Rather, they are presented to lend much needed insight into the issues and diverse perspectives of parents with sons in the prime age group for military recruitment.

Parent Images of the Military

In this research, major differences were observed between parents whose sons reported no interest in military service and those parents whose sons expressed some interest. Major differences also were observed between mothers and fathers of sons who reported no interest in military service. Mothers described images of the military that were mostly negative and said they would not like their sons to join. The majority of fathers, however, described more positive images of military service and stated that it would be a good experience for their sons. Indeed, their images were very similar to those of fathers and mothers whose sons expressed positive propensity for military service.

The majority of fathers of sons in both propensed and non-propensed groups and mothers of sons in the propensed group generally supported U.S. involvement in overseas peacekeeping missions. A sizable number of these parents, however, said they did not trust politicians to make the right decisions about where or when U.S. troops are deployed. A smaller number either described these missions as imperialist in nature or said the resources would be better spent addressing domestic problems. Dangerous aspects of these missions were mentioned by a few, usually in the context of the risk one takes in exchange for the many benefits of service to the individual and society.

Mothers of sons who expressed no interest in military service described images of the military that were mostly negative and clearly stated that they were relieved that their sons were disinterested. Fears of war and the draft were mentioned by the largest number of these mothers. Very few made reference to the U.S. military's involvement in peacekeeping missions. Among those who did, most expressed skepticism about the political nature of decisions affecting where or when U.S. troops are deployed, or the usefulness of the missions. Mothers of sons who were not interested in the military also expressed strongly negative views about the military's treatment of its war veterans—particularly those deployed during Operation Desert Storm/Shield or those who served in Vietnam.

Mothers and fathers of sons in both propensity groups described diverse images of military personnel and the military lifestyle. Some described very general positive images of military personnel—e.g., they are well trained, well disciplined, dedicated, and highly motivated individuals. Others mentioned the highly regimented environment of the military either attracts or produces “rigid” or “harsh” personalities. Yet others stated that people who join the military were looking for—or need—direction in their lives and have few other options. Many mothers of sons who expressed no interest in the military had a great deal to say about the military lifestyle. Some of these mothers believed the military does not provide its members with an acceptable standard of living. Others associated military life with corrupting influences or antisocial behaviors, such as drinking, smoking, drug use, and high rates of divorce.

Parents of sons in both propensity groups mostly described the military in pragmatic terms—e.g., whether it would facilitate or merely delay their sons' education and career. Only a few included patriotism or service to country among their images of the military.

Sons Disinterested in Military Service: Parent Perspectives

The majority of parents whose sons expressed no interest in military service when they were interviewed for YATS described having intact, middle class family living situations. About one-half of these parents or their spouses had served 2-3 years in the military.

These parents described their sons' approaches to careers and the future in mostly rational terms. Many said their sons had specific interests or talents that emerged when they were young. When it came time to plan their futures, they sought ways to transform these interests into careers. They spent time thinking about possible careers, gathering information, and gaining experiences before making firm commitments. The majority of parents supported this process and expressed confidence in their sons' abilities to achieve their education and career goals. In large part, this confidence stemmed from beliefs that their sons were making thoughtful decisions and selecting career paths that were meaningful to them.

Most said their sons never showed any interest in the military—not because the sons were against it, but because it never occurred to them. They speculated that this was because they were never really exposed to it. Recruiter contact with the youth was minimal or non-existent. Many veteran parents and nearly all non-veteran parents said they never talked to their sons about the military or did anything to encourage their sons to consider it. The few parents that were aware that their sons had some interest in the military in the past could not explain its demise. Many said they emphasized the importance of postsecondary education or training in their sons' upbringing. They believe that military service would distract their sons from pursuing their education or training and beginning meaningful careers. However, if their sons chose to enter the military, they would not stand in their way.

Most identified themselves as influential in their sons' development. They described close family ties and fairly open lines of communication. With respect to career planning, they explored their sons' interests with them and provided guidance without directing or prescribing the outcomes. Above all else, these parents wanted their sons to find careers that were interesting or worthwhile to them. In their roles as parents, then, they would do whatever they could to support their sons' efforts to find their niches—even when their goals or the means for achieving them seemed impractical or unrealistic.

Sons Interested in Military Service: Parent Perspectives

Parents of sons who expressed some interest in joining the military when they were interviewed for YATS, described diverse perspectives on youth propensity based largely on differences in their sons' approaches to thinking about the future and planning careers.

More than one-half described their sons' approaches to planning for their futures in mostly rational terms. From parents' accounts, most of their sons spent time exploring their interests; assessing their strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes; and gathering information. This study identified this group of sons as rational decision-makers. Among these parents of rational decision-making sons, three subgroups emerged based on differences in their sons' considerations of the military. The first subgroup consisted of parents of sons whose primary interest was to join one of the Armed Forces. Compared to all others in this study, these parents and their sons reported having the greatest exposure to the military lifestyle and recruiters. Some grew up in military families; others lived in close proximity to military installations. Based on their own experiences or observations, most were confident that their sons could find fulfillment in the military. They talked through various options with their sons and did not attempt to steer them toward particular careers or career destinations. However, they tended to mistrust recruiters and attempted to assert some authority in their sons' negotiations with them.

A second subgroup consisted of parents and sons who, for the most part, were attracted to the college benefits available to those who serve in the Armed Forces. The majority of these parents had little or no education beyond high school. They worked hard, but remained poor. Their sons had specific

career interests, but did not have sufficient resources to support them through college. Without a college education, they worried that their sons also would end up poor. Although none of these parents or their spouses had ever served in the military and recruiter contact was reported as being low, they were aware of college tuition benefits attached to service. In their eyes, and the eyes of their sons, the military offered one of the few paths to better and more fulfilling careers and lives.

A third subgroup consisted of parents whose sons had considered the military, but ultimately decided to pursue other paths. Some sons had specific career interests that they could have pursued in either the military or civilian sectors. However, when they learned that they might not get job assignments in the military that were compatible with their interests, their attention turned to the civilian sector. Unlike those in the previous subgroup, these parents could afford to pay for whatever education or training their sons needed to pursue their career interests.

The remaining parents—approximately one-half of those whose sons expressed some interest in the military when they were interviewed for YATS—described their sons as either diffuse decision-makers or disconnected youth. Parents of sons whose career interests are diffuse, used words like “unfocused,” “dreamy,” and “flighty” when they talked about their sons’ orientations to the future. Although their sons were either in school or working, they worried about their lack of direction. Parents of disconnected youth—i.e., those who were neither enrolled in school nor working—described their sons as very immature, rebellious and, in some cases, antisocial. Both groups of parents were mostly working class or poor and, compared to other groups of parents in this study, a disproportionate number described dysfunctional family living environments and/or difficult relationships with their sons. Many mentioned that the military would provide their sons with the discipline and direction their sons so desperately needed. Unfortunately, their sons did not seem inclined to join.

Implications for Recruitment

Over the past several years, the Armed Forces struggled to recruit sufficient numbers of young men into their ranks. For this reason, they were looking for ways to expand or enhance their recruitment strategies. Engaging parents in the recruitment process was one possibility. This in-depth study was undertaken to explore parent perspectives on the military and further understanding of youth propensity. The following implications for recruitment are based on key study findings:

- The Services might ease long-term recruitment problems through advertising campaigns that target pre-adolescent youth.
- Advertising campaigns that link military service with skills training and college tuition benefits appeal to lower middle and working class parents, but do not resonate with the needs or values of parents in the middle and upper middle classes.
- Recruitment efforts that rely on parents to direct or steer their sons toward the military are not likely to be successful.
- Efforts to provide parents with information about opportunities and benefits associated with military service may furnish them with the substance and impetus for talking about the military with their sons.
- High-pressure recruitment tactics may be counterproductive with parents.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS) began in 1975 as a relatively modest telephone survey of young men aged 16-21. Since then, it has grown into a complex annual telephone survey of 10,000 young men and women 16-24 years of age. Propensity to join the military—i.e., a youth's assessment of the likelihood that he or she would volunteer for one of the Services—is a key concept in the larger YATS effort. Over the years, it has provided a reliable measure of trends in youth attitudes toward the military and the characteristics of those who are likely to join and those who are unlikely to join. However, the large sample size and highly structured instrument that are used to achieve these precise estimates of propensity preclude exploration of complex factors that may underlie or explain any observed differences.

In 1995, in-depth studies of YATS respondents were initiated to increase understanding of youth propensity for military service. To date, these studies have focused on two broad areas of inquiry—the context and processes associated with career decision-making among different segments of the youth population, and circumstances affecting propensity for military service. This study is the first to collect information from parents.

Rationale for the Study and Research Questions

The basic rationale for this in-depth study of parents stems from two interrelated policy issues—declining trends in meeting recruitment goals among the various Services (GAO, February 24, 2000) and evidence from youth that parents influence their career decision-making (Lehnus, 1995; Nieva, *et al.*, 1995). To address these policy issues, the study was designed to answer four broad research questions. These are:

- How do parents describe their sons' approach or plans for the future?

- What roles do parents say they play in their sons' career decision-making?
- What images or opinions do parents have of the military? What images or opinions of the military do parents communicate to their sons?
- How do parents view their sons' propensity for military service? What do they see as the benefits and drawbacks of military service for their sons?

Methods

A total of 96 parents of sons between the ages of 16 and 22 who participated in the 1998 YATS survey were interviewed for this study. Sampling procedures were used to select approximately equal numbers of parents along the dimensions of gender, race/ethnicity, veteran status, sons' aptitudes for math, and sons' propensity for military service. The intent was to select a sufficient number of parents along each of these dimensions to assess similarities and differences within and across them.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed for the study. The guide covered all the major issues or topics of interest. Interviewers were encouraged to ask open-ended questions in the areas of interest, and let the parents talk. In this way, we were able to gather information that reflects those aspects of issues or topics that parents think are important. As needed, follow-up questions were used to encourage parents to expand or clarify their responses.

It is important to note that the analysis concerns a small number of parents and the findings are not presented as generalized estimates of the characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of the population. Rather, they are presented to lend much needed insight into the issues and diverse perspectives of parents with sons in the prime age group for military recruitment. Each in-depth interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

These transcripts constituted the raw data that was analyzed for this report. The analytic approach (Appendix A) conformed to commonly accepted standards for treating qualitative data. It included reading and processing more than 2,000 pages of transcribed interviews with parents, and generating and testing hypotheses about relationships and patterns in the data across cases.

Organization of Report

The report presents a detailed look at parent perspectives on the military, as well as sons' approaches to career decision-making and factors affecting sons' propensity for military service. Chapter 2 discusses the overall images that parents have of the military. Chapter 3 describes the dominant themes and perspectives that emerged from the in-depth interviews with parents whose sons expressed positive propensity for military service when they were interviewed for YATS. Chapter 4 describes the dominant themes or perspectives that emerged from interviews with parents whose sons were not interested in military service when they were interviewed for YATS. Chapter 5 discusses the policy implications of key findings.

2. PARENT IMAGES OF THE MILITARY

This chapter presents the overall images of the military articulated by parents, including their views on the role of the U.S. military in world affairs, the type of people who choose to join the military, and the benefits of military service. The chapter is organized into three major sections. The first and second sections present the images articulated by parents whose sons reported no interest in military service when they were interviewed for YATS and the images of parents whose sons expressed positive propensity for military service on YATS, respectively. The third section presents a summary of major findings.

Images of Parents Whose Sons Reported No Interest in Military Service

In general, it appears that parents of sons who are not interested in military service have not spent a lot of time thinking about the military—overall, or in terms of their sons. Most of these parents are middle class and slightly over half said either they or their spouses had served in the military, usually for 2-3 years. A few said their sons had considered military service, usually during high school, but decided against it.

Noteworthy differences were observed in the images articulated by mothers and fathers of sons who reported no interest in military service. Mothers described images of the military that are mostly negative and said they would not like their sons to join. The majority of fathers, however, described more positive images of military service and, if their sons ever expressed an interest, would support their decisions to join.

Images of Mothers Whose Sons Are Not Interested in Military Service

When mothers of sons who are not interested in military service were asked to describe their images of the military, the largest number mentioned fears of war, followed by poverty, neglect, and unhealthy lifestyles. Even with

probes from the interviewers, the majority found it difficult to articulate positive images.

Mothers' negative images: War. Fears of war and, by extension, reinstatement of the draft are the most frequently mentioned—and strongest—images of the military among mothers whose sons are not interested in joining. One mother's depiction is typical: "The first thing that comes to mind I guess, is just fear of ...there being a war and all these young people being taken." Others expressed their fears of war and the draft in more personal terms. As one mother of two sons put it:

War...the draft... I always worry about what would happen... I have two boys and will there be another war? And then [will there] be a mandatory draft and my boys will be sent off and probably get killed in some foreign country?

Another mother also fears war—particularly when it involves countries she thinks pose no direct threat to the U.S. She is relieved and happy that her son shows no interest in the military:

I'm happy that he's not interested. I know I would be scared. I would be worried. I know it's peace time now, but if he...was in there and he got called for something stupid—I call it stupid just because...I don't see anything directly affected over here—like Iran, Iraq, or something, I'd be scared to death.

Although the majority of mothers said they never discussed their feelings about the military directly with their sons, a few said their sons may have picked up on their fears. As one mother explained:

When my brother was stationed at Fort Sill, I was kind of scared that he was going to have to go to Iraq and I don't know if that fear plays a part with the way I parent or, you know, our distance from conversation about the military... So I don't know if [my son] actually knows that I'm scared and that's not

one of the choices I would make for him, but yeah, maybe something has rubbed off... But we don't actually have conversations about the military.

She expressed similar feelings and behavior when a recruiter met with her son during his sophomore year in high school:

I remember when my son was a sophomore [a recruiter called] and made an appointment to come by and see him... I remember them sitting at the kitchen table...and the guy was telling him how much they paid for his college or whatever, and he didn't seem to be interested at all. Well, I was happy he wasn't interested, but before he gave [the recruiter] his answer, I was kind of scared... I didn't let [my son] know I was scared though.

Another mother, whose son had considered the military before he enrolled in a law enforcement program, said she would have supported her son's decision to join. Her only worry, she said, would be combat:

Well, he thought about the military when he was in high school...and I just told him, you know, 'if that's what you really want.' But I would rather see him go to college and finish that and then if he decided to pursue the military, then that would be fine... [The only thing I worry about] is I'd be scared to death because him being my only child, you know, if he had to go to war... [But] he wants to be a police officer, you know, and that [also] scares me to death.

Very few mothers made reference to the military's involvement in peacekeeping missions. In response to probes, many said they did not follow the issues or "were not familiar enough with current events" to comment. A few said they supported what U.S. troops were trying to accomplish in places like Kuwait or Bosnia. However, a larger number expressed strong skepticism—either about the reasons U.S. troops are deployed, or their usefulness. An African American mother, for example, questions the motivations of leaders who are so quick to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, but refuse to respond

to similar tragedies when they occur in Africa. Another, who described herself as a pacifist, said she is jaded by the intrusive and political nature of these missions:

Well, you know, the Americans are always hated because we are always interfering, right? But...I don't really get involved with the politics, with what the U.S. does when they get involved with other countries...with foreign countries. A lot of it I don't believe that we should intervene, but I don't get involved with the war issues...the politics of war.

Along the same lines, another mother, a veteran, thinks the military is misused by politicians to divert the public's attention from their personal problems:

We're just a political game piece... The military is used [to] bomb a sovereign country or go into other countries when a President gets in trouble with political problems or promiscuity... [A] true military leader cannot disobey a command...even if the command is wrong.

A larger number expressed more general concerns that the U.S. meddles where it does not belong or that the resources would be better spent solving problems in "our own communities rather than...overseas." As one mother put it:

Sometimes I think it's none of [our] business to go [in foreign countries]... If you go back in history... I'm talking about hundreds of years because of their religion... It started off being because of their beliefs and now it has become a political thing... And I have mixed feelings about trying to make it look like it's deciding whether it's a democracy when I don't believe sometimes it pertains to that... And [the other] part I don't like is...we go in there and do damage and then, I guess, I feel like they have second thoughts and then they get themselves committed to rebuild what they destroyed and not really thinking about the people here in the United States.

This mother, who describes herself as a patriotic Mexican American, said she was “relieved” that her son never expressed an interest in joining the Service:

I don’t have the slightest idea why he didn’t want to go... I never asked him... I guess...it was kind of a relief or something to me, even though we know that when it comes down to it, it’s for our country and...we try to just portray that we are true Americans... And if it comes down to that, [then] he has to. But I think I could actually say I was relieved that he wasn’t gonna go.

Mothers’ negative images: Neglect or inadequate care of veterans. Several mothers expressed strong negative views on the treatment of veterans—particularly those who were deployed during Desert Storm or who served in Vietnam. A mother who said she has a number of family members and friends who have served in combat thinks “the men that served have pretty much been...horribly neglected.” In the words of another mother—whose husband was drafted during the Vietnam War, but never left the United States:

I think of war...and how the veterans were treated when they come back...and how they are treated today. They worked so hard for their country and what benefit did they get from that? Some people were left with a lot of mental illness, and that was a sad thing for them to go through—especially [since so many of them] were young kids.

Mothers’ negative images: Impoverished or corrupt lifestyle. About one-quarter of the mothers described impoverished or corrupt lifestyles among military personnel. Some said they think the military does not provide soldiers with an acceptable standard of living. Others said the military lifestyle promotes or is associated with corrupt or antisocial behaviors. Several mothers mentioned substandard living conditions, poor compensation, and declining post-service benefits among their images of the military lifestyle. One mother, an Army veteran, described the low wages and declining benefits of service as disgraceful:

If you have a family in the military, most of them have a real poverty level unless they’re officers and I think that’s a disgrace. And if you’re single, you don’t have the benefits that you used to have... I don’t think the medical care is as good. And the pay—you can make as much working at Burger King. Actually you can make more [at Burger King].

Another mother said her once positive images were shattered after her oldest son joined the Navy:

I used to think it would be a good place for kids to go, but I don’t believe it any more... My oldest son went into the military and he was led astray by the...recruiter... And I just feel that they don’t treat our boys like they should be treated for going in and giving their lives for our country like they do. And they have taken a lot of benefits and things away from them that they used to have... And I went down there to see him and the barracks was just terrible, absolutely terrible. When I think of all the military people being in there and if they don’t have anything to do then why don’t they let them paint the barracks and give them some place decent to live in? I was just very disappointed in the military. I just think that what our boys have to do in there and stuff, they ought to be treated right... I’m just not real happy with it at all.

Although none of the other mothers had personal contact with conditions in the military, recent news reports about military personnel who have to rely on food stamps to feed their families left lasting impressions on them. One mother’s reaction to these reports is typical:

There was one [documentary] that I saw about how they don’t get paid very well and...families...have to get food stamps and handouts from charity... And these people are working in the military and I thought that’s sad that people like that are in there working for the government and get paid so little... And there are people that come to this country—illegally or legally—from other countries and they get treated better. You know, that upsets me... I wouldn’t be part of

that and I wouldn't want my children to be part of that.

Several other mothers associated the military with corrupting influences and antisocial behaviors. The majority said their images were based on knowledge or observations of family members and friends who were either veterans or are presently serving in one of the Armed Forces. One mother, whose son spent four years in a high school ROTC program, said she would rather not have her children enter the military because she had a cousin who picked up a lot of bad habits in the Marines:

I'd rather my children weren't in the military. I had a cousin that was in the Marines and he came out worse than what he was when he went in... Came out drinking and smoking and stuff...that he didn't do when he went in... So I'd rather they weren't exposed to that.

Another mother who thinks there are many "honorable" people in the military, said she "doesn't agree with military life in general." Her images are colored by the behavior and experiences of people she has known:

I don't think I would want my children to be in the military because I...don't agree with military life in general. I have mixed feelings about it. On one end I feel that I look at the military and they're prestigious and honorable people. You know, I have respect for them. And then on the other end I've met many, including relatives, that have been in the military—for instance my brother-in-law who is still in the military and he's been very abusive to my sister and the military hasn't helped that situation at all. And I have known of people in the military that have gotten into bad life styles...they have divorced... they have become alcoholics, doing drugs, you know. I have heard bad, bad things of the lives that people live in the military and that's scary for me.

She believes strongly that her brother-in-law and others in the military are the way they are because of the military experience. "I've heard first

hand," she said, "that their lives [were] okay and then they've gotten into the military...and gotten into lifestyles that are not normal." For her, association of the military with "abnormal" or antisocial behaviors is more frightening than war. In her words:

I wouldn't want my children to get into the military [because of the bad lifestyle]... It's not because I fear war... If we was in war and they had to go, you know, that's a different thing... I believe in them helping out... But if they don't have to go...I would rather they didn't go.

Mothers' positive images: Discipline and education. Less than one-quarter of the mothers mentioned positive images of military service. Among those who did, their images were generally weak and, with a few exceptions, only mentioned in response to interviewer probes. They included practical benefits, such as tuition reimbursement and opportunities to see the world; and character building assets, such as discipline and respect. Further, they typically said they thought these benefits were good, but only for "certain types of people." As one mother put it:

For some people it's good because some people need the discipline... You know and they adapt to it. It's too disciplined for [my son] and...the discipline part would just blow his mind... Also, he's highly emotional so that's something I don't think would work for him at all. I'm sure he wouldn't want to be in the fighting and things like that... He's never had a fascination with killings or anything like that.

Another said the education benefits are good, but the discipline and structure of the military are not for everyone:

Well, I've known a lot who have gone in [the military] for money to use towards education and that's been a good thing. And some kids are, you know, they have gone in to go to school and they don't mind that discipline of going through that training, and they can survive that. But I don't think it's for everyone though.

One mother said the discipline is probably good “for those who are looking for that type of life.” She does not think it would be good for her son, though, since “he’s really sensitive about people verbally abusing him.”

Yet another said she had relatives who served in the military and thought it was good for them. Unlike her son, however, they did not have specific education and career goals. For her son, the military would delay his education and career:

We have a brother-in-law that’s a retired military man, and we have two nephews that are doing career military... And all of these people had kind of searched around for something to do career-wise and they more or less fell into the military and it worked satisfactorily for them... It might have been attractive [to my son] since he is a target shooter so that was a consideration if he could get into competitive shooting in the military. [But he] has other interests and goals... And I don’t think [the military] prepares people for forestry careers... He’d have to put his education on the side.

Several mothers view opportunities to “travel and see the world” as positive benefits of military service. One mother, who grew up in a military family, said she had an “absolutely wonderful childhood.” Her father, a Marine aviator, had assignments all over the world, which she described as a wonderful opportunity for her to “see the world” and “meet lots of different people.” She said she was in college before she realized that “the whole world doesn’t just pick up and move every two or three years.” She is the only mother who said she was “disappointed” that her son showed no interest in the military.

A larger number of mothers that included travel in their images, however, think the costs outweigh any benefits. As one mother explained, travel can be exciting, “but if they have families, the children can suffer.” Another thinks military travel separates children from their families. In her words: “There’s a lot of young [military] children that are left behind and it has to be devastating on the children.”

Images of Fathers Whose Sons Are Not Interested in Military Service

Fathers of sons who are not interested in military service expressed very different images of the military than mothers. More than three-quarters of the fathers said they would support their sons should they ever choose to join. However, they want their sons to select their own paths and, for that reason, would never actively lobby them to join.

When they talked about the military, they expressed mixed feelings about peacekeeping missions, but said little about war. Nearly all fathers mentioned the benefits of discipline and education in the military. Very few described negative aspects of military life.

War and peacekeeping missions. For the majority of fathers, war was not a dominant theme in their images of the military. Only a few mentioned it as a concern, usually in the context of the risk one takes in exchange for all the benefits. As one father put it: “It’s a good way to see the world, but there’s also a chance that you’re not going to come home either.” Only one father said he would prefer that his son not take that risk:

I wouldn’t want him to be in the military service...that’s for sure. I wouldn’t want him to go overseas, you know... Shoot at people... Use weapons... I don’t even hunt...and I don’t think he could do it either. And the one thing that I’d be worried about is I don’t want him to think that it’s okay... I don’t think that he would think that it was okay, but I think it would just do something to him... It would change him and I don’t want him to be changed really.

This same father said he had a brother who served in the early 1970’s. Like his son, “he was kind of happy-go-lucky” and the experience “wasn’t good for him.” After his brother got out, he said, “his mind was different.” Although the topic has never come up in conversations with his son, he said he would never discourage him from joining if that is what he chooses to do or tell his son that the military or anything else was not right for him.

He is fairly confident, however, that his son knows that he is not cut out for the military.

Like war, only a few fathers referred to U.S. involvement in peacekeeping missions overseas. However, these fathers had a lot to say. Only two fathers expressed positive support with no reservations. In the words of one, a prominent elected official: "Military institutions are necessary to protect democracy and the U.S. military has been very efficient in doing that." Another, who was rejected by the military because his knees were so banged up from football, put it this way:

I think everyone has a fear that with the winding down of the cold war...that Americans are now seen as the world's peacekeepers and the world's police force. And sometimes that's a difficult situation to be in... You're always going to anger somebody, you know. If we stood back, then we'd get the heat for 'why aren't the Americans taking control of the situation?' And when we...get involved...we're taking heat because 'well, they're only out there to protect their own interests.' So it's a difficult situation. I think in order to maintain stability and to maintain world order you need to have a strong force somewhere and, right now, the Americans seem to be forefront... I don't think it's anything we can turn our backs on... I wasn't around during the isolationism before World War II...but the rest of the world was really in harm's way if we weren't involved with it. So I'm a supporter of the military. I think they are needed.

The majority of others, however, expressed views that were more ambivalent or mixed:

Well, there's times when I agree with it and there's times when I think that we oughta just mind our own business... There are times and places where we gotta, you know, intercede and then again there's a few things that we should just let the countries work it out and see what happens before we jump in.

This father is particularly critical of peacekeeping missions:

Well, when we go in there for peacekeeping missions, that's the time not to go in... That's a wrong reason to send the military in. I mean cause that's just another instigation to start another Vietnam.

Another father who thinks that the military is doing a "very good job" overall, sometimes questions the motives behind its involvement in peacekeeping and other missions:

I can only hope that whatever [we're] doing over there is just for the benefit of whatever country...not just empowering the United States over everyone in the world... I think the United States controls the world really... [and thinks] it can have whatever it wants.

Yet another father agrees that a strong military force is necessary, but questions the role of the United States as the world's policeman. Also, modern day global politics have changed, he said, and other world powers should be doing more to help:

I think we need to be strong in the military... We are the major superpower... But I'm not sure that sometimes we don't get our nose into something we shouldn't be getting into. You know, the world policeman type thing. I'm more in support of...if we have a national threat against us...then definitely we should do something. But sometimes I wonder about the decisions that are made about where we go and what we do... We need to be a world power and hold things together... But little by little it's becoming more of a unified world...and I think other [countries] ought to help us out a little bit [more].

Discipline. Discipline figured prominently in these fathers' images of the military. The majority said it was the first thing that came to their minds when they thought about the military. In general, they view it in a positive light. Their only major qualification was that it is "not for everyone."

One upper middle-class father who served in the Marines during Vietnam, but did not see combat, thinks the military can jumpstart non-college-

bound youth who might otherwise be drifting or working in jobs that offer few chances for advancement:

For some people, I think the military is the place to be... Especially kids that don't know where they're going and what they're going to do. And they can get in there and get out on their own and mature a little bit and figure out, 'hey, you know, maybe school's a pretty good deal,' you know, versus working for lower wages... And I think they can learn a lot of discipline.

He described his son as an ambitious college sophomore with strong interests in entering the field of computer science and making a lot of money. Nevertheless, he thinks the military would be a good experience for his son:

I haven't pushed him one way or the other... He was better than most at sports...but he never was much of a physical guy... But, you know, since I was in the military, I've always told him, 'yeah, it would be pretty good for somebody to do that.' I sure wouldn't have stopped him if he ever decided he wanted to go in and thought he could improve his career through that... But...he's sure not interested in doing it right now.

An older stepfather thinks the military is especially well suited to the needs of wayward, non-college-bound youth. This opinion, he said, is based on his own personal experiences and what the military did for him:

I know what it done for me... I was a pretty tough kid until I went in the Service... I was in the Navy and I went to the brig for being a tough kid. And when I came out, I had respect for people's rank, you know, whether or not I was older than him or not... So I think the military probably saved me from having to go through the penitentiary or who knows what... I could have died, you know, on the streets and I have to give the military a lot of credit for changing my...perspective. Even at that young age, I came out and when I went to work in the free world out here I...was successful I think because I had a certain

amount of respect for the person, for the title, for your job. Whether I liked you or not, I respected your position. And that came from serving in the military.

Recently, he drew on these lessons to encourage his nephew to re-enlist:

I have a nephew and I think I probably influenced him to making a career out of it... He wanted to get out... He came home on leave for Christmas and I told him, you know, I just said, 'why are you getting out?' And he said 'well'...and he named off all these things... And I said, 'it sounds like the real world... See [I'm black too] and I was one of those guys that thought they were prejudiced, all these things, when I was in the Service 40 years ago... It's a lot better than out here for a person just going to work on an 8 to 4 o'clock job... Do you realize all the opportunities you have in there?' He said, 'yeah.'

An upper middle-class father also strongly associates the military with discipline and structure. His oldest son joined the Navy after he finished college and learned that music—his first love—was not going to put food on the table. He said it has been a very good experience for him and that he is “thriving” on the structure:

I'm very happy with my oldest boy who is in now... After being in school for five years...and being on his own for three years, he joined the Navy... He thrives on that structure. He loves the military lifestyle... It's given structure to...his life and he thrives in that environment... He has always been more structured... He was a music major in school and was in the band all [through] college and now he's looking at the music program in the military... That was the only place he could go and continue to be in a music and band setting... He wants to be in the Navy band...but also to gain professional skills... He's scheduled to go into advanced electronics when he finishes his first assignment.

At one point he was “suggesting” to his younger son that he go into the military because he thought

he “needed that kind of discipline.” His son considered it, but did not take the bait. In hindsight, his father said this son would have had problems adjusting to the structure of the military:

I know his personality is such that he really has a hard time sometimes with authority. You can’t be demanding and directive with him... You have to talk things through...and let that research process in his mind click through before he’ll make a decision. He’s not one to be able to just take direct orders...and I think from that standpoint he would have a difficult time with the military... He has a difficult time sometimes with any structure... He questions a lot... ‘why do we have to do it this way?’ or ‘why do we have to do it that way?’ rather than just doing it... I was suggesting the military because I thought he needed that kind of discipline... But [unlike my other son] I think he would have had a difficult time with it.

Another father believes that every American should go through at least basic training so they can develop respect for hierarchy and better appreciate those who are in it for the long haul. This attitude, he said, comes from his father, a World War II veteran, who told his brother and him that they were going into the Service as soon as they turned 18. He never actually served, however. By the time he graduated from high school, his father was frightened by the turn of events in Vietnam and discouraged him from joining:

When I was young my father always told my one brother and myself that we were going in the Service as soon as we were 18. And when I got out of school I told my father I was gonna join the Air Force and he told me to hold off for a while... I never realized he paid attention to my draft number, but I come to find out, probably about 10 years ago, that he knew my number better than I did. And he was more petrified of Vietnam than I was and he was in World War II.

Another father also thinks of discipline when he thinks of the military. “It’s a good thing,” he said,

“but I think you have to like that and you have to be that type of person.” He said his son is “laid back,” “not outspoken,” and “just not the type of person who would survive” in the military. Several other fathers who think discipline is good, said their sons could handle it.

Education and jobs. A sizable number of fathers said when they think of the military, they think of the excellent education opportunities it provides. In the words of one father:

Sure there’s advantages... I think they offer a lot to...somebody that wants to put out for it... There’s all kinds of schooling I’m sure they can get and different fields [they can choose to specialize in]... If that’s what he chooses to do I’d back him 100 percent... Whatever he had done in the military he would make use of it...after [he got out].

Another father said if he and his wife were not able to afford their son’s tuition, he might have encouraged his son to go in:

I don’t see the military as being a bad thing for someone to go into... I would say the caliber of people that are in the military today is very high. From what I’ve seen on television, interviews of officers and even enlisted men, you know, by TV reporters...they all seem to be decent, upstanding good citizens... They do offer a lot of good programs for people willing to go in the Reserves and...get money for college. We’ve seen ads. In fact, the Army recruiter was here and talked to [my son]. And you know, it is a good program, but we were able to financially afford to send him on our own... So if we weren’t able [to pay his tuition], I think it would be a good thing for him to do.

A grandfather, who stepped in as the father figure when his grandson’s father died, thinks the “stern discipline” discourages many young men from joining. If they can get past that, however, he thinks the military provides excellent education and career opportunities:

The minus...would be with any young man...the stern discipline, the restrictions that can be placed upon you... [But] the plus is he can go in and further his education... Get in a field that he desires because just about any field that you can think about is in the military... He's interested in drama... So if he wanted to go into drama you have the special services and stuff like that that entertains the military itself... I served in the military three years... I got great education from that and it...almost sets your goals for the future.

His grandson's mother, his daughter, has served 19 years in the military and all of his other six children served. Although his grandson has not expressed an interest in joining since he was in his early teens, if he did, the grandfather would urge him to join the Air Force. Compared to the Army, he thinks the Air Force offers better and more flexible job assignments. In his words:

When [my grandson] was in his lower teens...that's when he thought about [the military]...I think it's the enthusiasm of the equipment that he'd seen and...wanting to be a part of it... But he hasn't spoke anything about the military recently... We never got into...[talking about] which branch of service... But if I was gonna pick a branch I would say the Air Force because it's a lot more progressive... It's more harder to achieve different levels in the Army than it is to achieve in the Air Force because in the Army you can become deadlocked into a slot that you might not particularly like.

Several other fathers said the GI Bill was a central feature in their images of the military. They told their sons that the "military would not be a bad way to go." One father, whose son had a rough first year in college, for example, told his son that he "might want to think about going into the military and then use the GI Bill to go to college afterwards."

Images of Parents of Sons Who Expressed Positive Propensity for Military Service

In general, parents of sons who expressed positive propensity for military service have more positive images of the military than those expressed by parents of sons who have no interest in joining.

As a group, the parents of positive propensity sons were less well off and included more parents from career military households. Nearly three-quarters were blue collar or service workers. The balance either earned middle-class incomes or supported their families with income from SSI or other public sources.

Another noteworthy observation about these parents is the absence of systematic differences in the images held by mothers and fathers. Further, there was as much variation within veteran status, race/ethnicity and other groupings as there was between them. For these reasons, the following presentation covers the entire group of parents whose sons expressed positive propensity for military service. It is organized around the dominant or noteworthy themes that emerged from their interviews—images of the role of the U.S. military in contemporary world affairs, images of military personnel or the military lifestyle, and patriotism.

Role of the U.S. Military in World Affairs

When asked to describe their images of the military, more than one-half of the parents of youth who expressed positive propensity for military service mentioned U.S. involvement in international peacekeeping missions. The images and impressions of these parents, who included veterans and non-veterans and represented a cross-section of demographic characteristics, were mostly positive. With some reservations, the majority said they thought the role of the U.S. military overseas is necessary for the preservation of world peace and the American way of life.

Most parents of positive propensity sons think U.S. involvement in overseas peacekeeping missions are important and necessary functions of

the military. One father, who served during the Vietnam era, spoke for many others when he said:

I've heard [the U.S. military] described as the world's policeman and I think that's a necessary thing. For instance, in Kosovo...I'm proud that the United States has stepped in over there and intervened in what was going on with the ethnic cleansing.

Another father agreed, adding:

We have to participate in the world or we'll be looking at a new world-order because if we're not standing there looking over them, then someone else will slip in and take them in another direction.

Despite this strong foundation of support for our military's place in world affairs, many of these same parents also expressed some reservations. The largest number mentioned concerns that the U.S. military sometimes gets "too involved" in the affairs of other countries, but conceded that "somebody has to do it." Other parents—mostly from career military households—said they worry that the military does not have sufficient resources to accomplish all the missions it is asked to undertake. In the words of a Reservist who was called into active duty during Desert Storm:

The military today is stretched very thin. There's not enough people to do the things this country is called upon to do... Also not enough resources to do it. I can speak to that just because of [my involvement in] Desert Storm.

Other parents of positive propensity sons expressed concerns with the role that politicians play in decisions about how and when the military is deployed. As one mother explained:

I don't always agree with where [Congress says] we have to be... But to protect our sanction in the world we have to be where we are at because we're one of the most powerful countries in the world—in technology and military—everything revolves around us... We're the peacemakers. We're the ones that help other countries that are in trouble. I

don't see many other countries that will give another country billions of dollars to put food on their tables... I don't always agree with where we have to be, but I will stand by them.

Another, who praised the professionalism of our troops, also said he did not always trust the way politicians in Washington choose to use them. In his words:

[Our troops] seem well trained and they seem to do a really good job at what they do... I think we probably have the best military in the world as far as being organized and being well supported with the technologies we have. But how those politicians choose to use it is another story.

In addition to disagreements with decisions made by politicians about where U.S. troops are deployed or not deployed, several expressed concern over the treatment of soldiers when they return. In particular, they criticized politicians and the Services because they turned their backs on Vietnam and Desert Storm veterans and failed to provide them with the treatment and services they needed when they returned home from war.

A few parents—all non-veteran fathers from economically distressed areas—expressed domestic priorities. In the words of one:

They could do more here than they could do anywhere else. The things they are doing for all these other countries they could do more for the people here. You got too many problems here at home... You got to build a strong home first before you can go out and help someone else. This is the way I was taught... This is the way I was raised.

In their overall images, most depicted the military today in terms of its peacekeeping mission, not war. As will be shown in Chapter 4, however, a sizable number of parents—particularly mothers—mentioned war among their concerns should their sons ever choose to join the military.

Personnel and the Military Lifestyle

About one-half of the parents in the positive propensity group also included something about the type of people who choose to enter the military or the military lifestyle in their overall images. About one-half of these parents, mostly non-veterans, mentioned only very general positive images of people in the military. As one mother put it, “wherever our soldiers go, people admire them.” A father described those who choose to serve as “important people.” “If anything occurs,” he explained, “they are out there to protect us... Protect the United States.” Another father, who was discharged from the Army after six months because he disagreed with his job assignment, said he admires their commitment:

I admire people in the military... That’s a heck of a commitment...to be ready to go at the drop of a hat, to be ready to go and put your life on the line for somebody like me that’s sitting up here in the mountains kicked back in a chair with my feet propped up.

Among the parents who went beyond these very general images of the military, the largest number said discipline is the first image that comes to mind when they think about the military and the sorts of people who are attracted to it. For some, this is a positive image; for others, it is not. One mother’s depiction summarizes most of the positive images of discipline that were mentioned among this group of parents:

The military is good... People in it have self control... It doesn’t matter what anybody says, they’re just cool, calm, and collected. [If you’re in the military], you discipline yourself in your behavior towards others, discipline yourself...how you react [to situations]. [You] listen to other people without having to back talk. You just let them talk and sometimes you can’t say anything... You have to follow orders, whether you like them or not.

A smaller, but still sizable, number of parents expressed negative interpretations of discipline. They think the highly regimented environment of the military either attracts or produces people with

“rigid” or “harsh” personalities. Their impressions were mostly shaped from their own experiences or observations of family members who had served. One mother’s story is typical:

My dad was a very strict disciplinarian and I really think that is because he was in the military since he was 18... I just think it makes people harsh... There’s a certain kind of people that like the security and routine [of military life]...and don’t like to make decisions on their own and really don’t have much direction of their own.

Several other parents who held similar views also think there are greater discontinuities today between the discipline in the military and the way children are raised than existed in previous generations. In their opinion, too few youth can fit into the military mold.

In addition to their views of discipline, parents of positive propensity sons articulated diverse images of the sort of people who serve, or would benefit most from serving, in the military today. The largest number described narrow stereotypical images of young men who joined. One mother’s depiction is typical of this group. In a nutshell, she thinks young people who join the military are those who cannot “cut it” in college:

I don’t think people that are really goal-oriented...the real high achievers...end up in the military unless they end up in one of the academies. Those are high achievers... But that’s just a handful... I used to work for the college... If you’re a real winner you go to a four-year college. If you’re just getting by there’s community college and if you don’t have any options at all you go to the military... I hear students talking and I know from listening to my son and his friends that that’s what I hear as well... After all, the military takes everyone, right? I was raised in a military family... [So these] attitudes about the military are basically mine. They don’t reflect my family’s.

According to another father, “most go [into the military] because they are undecided in life... They don’t know what to do, so that’s where they

go.” A mother said “a lot of parents choose to send their children off to the military to get jobs and keep them off the streets.” Along the same lines, other parents said an important function of today’s military is to provide a structured environment that transforms wayward youth into mature and responsible adults. As one mother explained:

A lot of young men today need some kind of foundation and a lot of them they don’t have fathers—either they just have a mother or their fathers don’t have time out with their sons...and I believe that’s why there’s a lot of gangs out there... I think the military is a good thing for people like that... It helps them to get out of those gangs, get out of the streets, don’t have to go to jail, don’t have to sell drugs or be an alcoholic... It gives them something based on life where they don’t have to get [led astray by] any kind of friends... It gives them a future, it gives them a foundation...and motivation... You know, something to look forward to.

Several thought this function was justification enough for reinstating a universal draft:

There’s a lot of boys in between 15 and God knows when it ends, but they’re just kind of at loose ends, they lack direction. I really think in a way it’s a shame that we don’t have the mandatory draft that we used to have when I was growing up because it really gave a lot of young guys a couple of years of just exposure to everything... When I was young everybody went... The only thing that I think really turned a lot of people against it was the whole Vietnam thing... But for many guys it made the difference between whether they grew up in a couple of years or didn’t grow up... I mean until they got a lot older.

Not all parents of positive propensity sons, however, shared these narrow stereotypical images. Nearly one-half—veterans and non-veterans alike—described people who serve in the Armed Forces as “talented,” “dedicated,” and “highly motivated” individuals. Included in this group are several fathers who had negative experiences during Vietnam. One father, for

example, who had served in the Tonkin Gulf during the Vietnam conflict said “I’m sure it’s a lot different than it was back then. A lot less lenient... It’s a good thing to go through.” Another, who served in the Navy from 1970-74 said the military has “changed a lot since [he] was in there...it’s a lot more professional now.”

Many of these parents, particularly those who raised their children in military families, said they were well aware of the negative stereotypes that the American public had of people in the Service. In the words of one military wife:

I like the military life... I think that just like in every walk of life you get people that are basically just sitting there not really doing anything or not taking advantage of what they have... But you know, we’ve met wonderful people in the military... I think a lot of civilian people don’t understand there are people in the military who are, let’s just say, great investors... They have their military jobs and they’re investing on the side or there are people who are really educated in the military... I know that oftentimes if a civilian finds out that my husband has a master’s degree...they’re shocked.

Another military parent blamed many of the stereotypical images of the military on the new breed of young people who are going into the military just to get the college benefits. In her words:

[People get negative images] of people in the military from those that just go in for the college... They don’t really care about the military or [projecting] a positive image... They should have a little more respect for it and for themselves—their appearance and what they’re doing during their off time.

Others, however, were more inclined to attribute negative perceptions of the military and military personnel on their portrayal in movies and by the news media.

Patriotism

Only a very small number of parents included patriotism or service to their country among their images of the military. For the most part, these were retired career military personnel or their spouses who feel today's youth lack the patriotism that was so prevalent in their own youth. Their views on this topic are strong and worth noting.

One father said he joined the Army in the 1970's because "serving your country was the right thing to do" back then. In the 1990's, however, that sentiment of service to your country is lost. "Now," he said, "I don't know why people join."

A mother, whose husband recently retired from the Army, said patriotism figured prominently in her image of the military. "Unfortunately," she said, "it's not as important now as it was probably 20 years ago." In the absence of patriotism, she worries that the American public may not appreciate the sacrifices that those who do serve in the Armed Forces make to protect them and preserve a way of life that they too easily take for granted:

Civilians don't understand that military personnel have a type of dedication to what they do. Whereas on the outside when they just don't like what they're doing...they'll quit and go somewhere else. You can't do that in the Army. You're doing a job for a particular reason [and that is to protect the American lifestyle]... They don't realize what [military families] go through [to serve their country]... When we were married it was very tough for me... I had the concept you think your husband's gonna come home on time for dinner... Boy that's out the window. He could call you and say, 'Honey, I have to go and I won't be home for a few days'... [And] what our kids go through in moving... You worry about them; they lose their friends all the time. Civilians don't understand that.

Another father who served in Vietnam said he was "disturbed" by the erosion of patriotism among today's youth:

Nowadays I think when you join or go in...it's not for your country. It's more for, 'yeah, they've got a great college plan.' Which is all good, you know, but I really thought that the first thing is to love your country or whatever... I'm backing my country or whatever... I'm disturbed by it because I'm from the old school and in those things—the morals, the standards, you know, the tradition, I don't think they mean quite the same... To wear a military uniform...it's not the same.

He attributes this change, in part at least, to the Vietnam War:

It started changing in the Vietnam era when I guess it wasn't so cool to be a soldier, you know. Or maybe the American public just got a little bit wiser as to why we were sending our troops into certain places and having them, you know, harmed... I think it changed the whole structure [and how Americans viewed the military].

Several parents—mothers and fathers—suggested that reinstatement of a universal draft might foster sentiments of patriotism and service to country among the American public:

I would support [reinstatement] of a universal draft... It's an equalizer in society...and it teaches the value that you owe your country something and you do something for your country... I don't think a year out of anyone's life is a tragedy.

Summary

This chapter presented the overall images of the military among two groups of parents, based on whether or not their sons expressed interest in joining the military during their YATS interviews.

Major differences were observed between mothers and fathers of sons who reported no interest in military service. Mothers described images of the military that are mostly negative and said they would not like their sons to join. The majority of fathers, however, described more positive images of military service and think it would be a good

experience for their sons. Indeed, their images were very similar to those of fathers and mothers whose sons expressed positive propensity for military service.

The majority of fathers of sons in both propensity groups and mothers of sons in the positive propensity group generally supported U.S. involvement in overseas peacekeeping missions. A sizable number of these parents, however, said they did not trust politicians to make the right decisions about where or when U.S. troops are deployed. A smaller number either described these missions as imperialist in nature or said the resources would be better spent addressing domestic problems. Dangerous aspects of these missions were mentioned by a few, usually in the context of the risk one takes in exchange for the many benefits of service to the individual and society.

Mothers of sons who expressed no interest in military service described images of the military that are mostly negative and clearly stated that they were relieved that their sons were not interested. Fears of war and, by extension the draft, were mentioned by the largest number of these mothers. Very few made reference to the U.S. military's involvement in peacekeeping missions. Among those that did, most expressed skepticism about the political nature of decisions affecting where or when U.S. troops are deployed, or the usefulness of the missions. Mothers of sons who are not interested in the military also expressed strong and negative views about the military's treatment of its war veterans—particularly those deployed during Operation Desert Storm or who served in Vietnam.

Mothers and fathers of sons in both propensity groups described diverse images of military personnel and the military lifestyle. Some described very general positive images of military personnel—e.g., they are well trained, well disciplined, dedicated, and highly motivated individuals. Others think the highly regimented environment of the military either attracts or produces “rigid” or “harsh” personalities. Yet others believe that people who join the military are looking for—or need—direction in their lives and have few other options. Many mothers of

sons who expressed no interest in the military at the time of YATS had the most to say about the military lifestyle. Some of these mothers believe the military does not provide its members with an acceptable standard of living. Others associate military life with corrupting influences or antisocial behaviors, such as drinking, smoking, drug use, and high rates of divorce.

Parents of sons in both propensity groups mostly think about the military in pragmatic terms—e.g., whether it will facilitate or merely delay their sons' education and career. Only a few included patriotism or service to country among their images of the military.

3. SONS NOT INTERESTED IN MILITARY SERVICE: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

This chapter presents the perspectives of parents whose sons, for the most part, are not interested in military service. These parents comprise about one-half of all parents in the study. The majority described intact family living situations and solid middle- or upper-middle-class incomes. About one-half of these parents or their spouses served 2-3 years in the military.

The chapter is organized into three major sections. The first section describes sons' approaches to career decision-making, including selection of careers and parent perceptions of their sons' plans. The second and third sections describe parent perceptions of influence on their sons and sons' exposure to the military, respectively.

Sons' Approaches to Career Decision-making

The majority of parents whose sons show no interest in military service described their sons' approaches to careers and the future in mostly rational terms. From their accounts, most of their sons have spent time exploring their interests; assessing their strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes; and gathering information. The majority said the military never came up in their sons' deliberations. The following summarizes their depictions of their son's approaches to selecting careers, followed by a discussion of their assessments of the directions their sons are headed.

Selection of Careers

Nearly three-quarters of parents, whose sons expressed no interest in military service when they were interviewed for YATS, said their sons had interests or talents that emerged at a young age. These interests were diverse, ranging from engineering, law, veterinary science and farming to cartoon animation, acting, rodeo riding and motorcycle mechanics. When it came time for their sons to think about what they would like to

do after high school, most sought ways to transform these interests into professions or careers. One mother, for example, said she was not at all surprised when her son told her that he wanted to pursue a career in engineering since he had been building and inventing things his entire life:

He was very involved from a toddler with Lego's and he still has a lot of pride in the structures that he built... Even at the age of 20 he displays them... And he always spoke of science and of building some kind of vehicle that would, you know, involve science... And he spoke of...[wanting] to build things that he wanted and not have to rely on people to do things for him or build his home or build things like that since he was young... So I figured it would be science, architecture, or something like that.

Another mother told much the same story about her son's interest in becoming a wildlife photographer for National Geographic:

Art and the love of animals... That is something that has always been there since he was very young... So I guess what he is doing now—[wildlife photography]—is something that I expected of him.

A father said his son's penchant for golf motivated him to look into college programs in golf course management. Another mother said her son shared her husband's passion for sports. His first career choice, she said, would have been professional athlete. Realizing that he would not get very far with his limited playing abilities, he decided to approach sports from the perspective of business:

He had taken some business classes in high school that he liked and he did well in, and he got to use some of those skills he had learned during his internship [with the high school athletic director]... I think he liked it that he

was dealing with sports... He'd like to...have work related to sports, realizing that he's not a good enough athlete to ever...participate as a player... I think that was his idea to get a degree with a business background. He hopes that he can do something with it in the sports field...on a college or professional level.

Not all their sons plan to attend college. Nevertheless, they have specific career interests they are pursuing in a systematic or rational way. One mother, for example, said her son was interested in public safety. When he turned 16, he volunteered at the local fire department to "see what that was like." He also worked for a security firm and spent time at the local police station before he decided to become a police officer:

He's been involved with the firehouse since he was 16 years old...and he really enjoyed that. He thought that would be very interesting... He worked for a little bit for a security firm, just to see if he'd like [police work]... He works right now with the county police department and was just hired part-time with the township department... His main goal is to be hired full-time in a township police department... He takes every test that's available.

Another mother, a farmer's wife, described her son as a very "responsible, reliable youngster that is energetic and goes after what he wants." She said he grew up helping his father on the farm and now wants to start one of his own. It is clear from this mother's account, that her son has thought very carefully about what he needs to do to achieve this goal:

He said he wanted to try farming...and when he says he's going to do something he usually does it... He worked full-time...in fast food...all through high school and bought himself...35 head of cattle. [And] he is going to farm 80 acres of ground—somebody else's—this year, and possibly take some classes in [agriculture] at the community college in the fall. Then he is going to start working at Diamond Plastics... He's [already] talked to them down at the bank... He wants to get bigger as he goes. He feels that if he

saves his money from Diamond Plastics, that he could buy a farm... You just can't start farming...not in this day and age. It isn't like it used to be. So once he gets 200 or 300 acres of corn that is going to keep him busy, or more cattle, then he can quit that job.

Her son is aware of the risks and hardships associated with farming—especially for small independent operations, and has mentioned the military as a possible back up plan:

If farming doesn't turn out or whatever, then he might [enlist]... If he would get his schooling paid for or whatever, he might want to go in. I don't know. He probably is disinterested right now... He talked about the military once, but decided against it.

Only a small number of other parents—mostly fathers—were aware that their sons had ever considered the military or thought about it as an option. Several said they suggested ROTC or one of the Services, but their sons were not interested. One mother said her son, an amateur sharpshooter, had thought about applying for the Army's competitive target shooting team. His interest in forestry was stronger, though, and he knew the Army would not prepare him for a career in that field. A few others mentioned that when their sons were younger they went through a phase when they were interested in firearms and the military. As one father explained:

He always had this fascination with firearms... When he was in high school he thought about law enforcement and that's when he got interested in the military. And we looked at a couple of options—colleges with law enforcement programs, as well as ROTC—and I thought the best training he could get would be in the military... Then a policeman got shot here...and I think he realized it's not just [carrying a gun and riding around in the community]... I don't know what the thought process was, but in his senior year he shifted his interest to business... I think he wanted to go to college... Go right into a college setting.

Another father said his son considered the military when he was in high school, but ultimately chose to work in the family's well-drilling business. This father "loves it" that his son is interested in the business, but wants him to get some back up skills—either by going to college or joining the military. He does not know why his son lost interest. Both he and his wife would have supported his decision to join:

I remember 30 years ago my father telling me that the well driller was like the ice man... The refrigerator put the ice man out of business and city water is putting the well driller out of business... So I want him to go get something he can always fall back on...whether it's through college or the military... There for a while when he was in high school he was talking about [the military]... My wife and I both told him, you know, if that's what he wanted to do, go for it. And then, I don't know why he didn't or anything, but it just kind of went by the wayside.

Parent Perceptions of Son's Career Plans

Overall, parents of sons who are not interested in military service are confident that their sons are on the road to becoming productive and, hopefully, happy adults. Most are pursuing something that is constructive and interesting to them, and their goals and visions of the future—what they want and what they do not want—are becoming clearer with experience.

Although not yet fully mature, most said their sons have good heads on their shoulders and are motivated to find their niches. As one father put it:

Gosh, I really don't worry about him at all. He's a pretty level headed kid and I really don't have any worries about him. I think he's going to be fine at whatever [he chooses] to do. I mean, you know, he's smart enough and he's got enough common sense to see himself through just about everything.

Another said his son "has a good head on his shoulders" and will "succeed at whatever he puts his mind to." This confidence in their sons was buttressed by the fact that their sons spent considerable time gathering information on careers that matched their interests.

[My son] looked at the different opportunities out there and thought [computer programming] was pretty good money, plus he loves computers and wanted to do something with that anyway... And he looked at the different computer majors and he tried to pick one that he could do the best in.

Other parents described their sons as "thorough" in their research of various career options and what was required to achieve them. One parent, for example, said her son is "just not the sort of kid" to jump into a career without knowing what it would be like.

A paramount concern of these parents is for their sons to find careers in fields they "enjoy." As one mother whose son plans to get a Ph.D. in engineering put it:

Well, this is what I think. As long as he earns an honest dollar, it doesn't matter what he's doing... And that's what I told him... [Also, I told him] he cannot become too obsessed with materialistic things... If it comes down to where he's a teacher, regardless of how much education he has...if he's doing something he enjoys, that's what counts... [I want him to do] whatever he enjoys and not just getting stuck in something because it pays good.

Toward this end, the parents described their roles as mostly supportive and non-prescriptive. Rather than suggest specific careers or career paths, they encourage their sons to pursue their interests and learn from their experiences. As one mother explained: "I don't want to make a choice for him and then ...[have him be] miserable. I want him to pick whatever he wants to pick... I want it to be his choice, not mine." Another mother, whose 20-year-old son recently changed his major from veterinary medicine to film production, described

the supportive and developmental approach she and her husband have taken:

Well, you know, we talk a lot about what it is that he likes to do, and I do encourage him to do what he sets out to do. And I...always tell him that I will support him in whatever it is he wants to do. Both my husband and I, you know, we are there for him... And if he needs something we do try to get him to try to support himself. If there is something he wants to do he needs to save up for it, you know. But if something happens, he does know we are here. It's okay to step out of the boundaries and test that water, you know. Things aren't always going to work out... But it's okay to explore those things that you are interested in. He is young enough.

Several parents believe their sons' career choices are not practical or, in some cases, realistic. Rather than "dash their dreams" or "dampen their spirits," they are willing and financially able to let them try. One father, for example, is leery of his son's decision to pursue an acting career, but will "stand behind him all the way...in whatever he wants to do." Another mother worries that graphic arts will not provide her son with a secure future:

I really wanted my son to get into computers...because I feel it's more secure than [graphic arts]. I'm not a dreamer like he is... I really would prefer something more practical, more secure for his future. I talked to him about it, but he's still dreaming... He's a young person and I feel that's the way that they think.

A father, whose son is enrolled in a highly specialized course in motorcycle maintenance and repair, would rather see him go into engineering. However, he is careful not to push his son in any particular direction. He is happy that he is pursuing something he enjoys:

He's been interested in motorcycles his whole life... I have mixed feelings. I'm not...exactly sure if he can make a good living doing this...because there are so many mechanics. I don't know enough about

certified mechanics to know if he's going to have a job after he gets out... If he's going to do well at it or just make an average living... I'd rather that he get an engineering degree... It's a cleaner job...and pays more and he'd have a better life... But to him that's...boring... I'm not going to push anything on him... At least he's headed in a direction and that's what he wants to do. So I'm happy about that.

Like so many of the other parents, this father wants his son to pursue his interests—whatever they are—before he is locked into adult relationships and responsibilities. "After he gets through the mechanics training, he can decide if he wants to do something else... He'll still only be 20 years old."

Influences

The majority of parents whose sons have no apparent interest in military service believe they have played major roles in their sons' lives. When asked to describe these roles, most said they instilled in their sons certain values and were accessible whenever their sons needed advice or just wanted to talk. From their accounts, these parents also did much to facilitate their sons' decision-making and goals—e.g., taking them to visit colleges and providing financial support.

Inculcation of Values

One of the more direct ways that parents of negative propensity sons influenced them was through socialization experiences in the home and the inculcation of values. Many parents, for example, said they eat dinner together every night, take outings and vacations together, or go to church as a family. Also, in one way or another, the majority of parents said they emphasized the importance of education in their children's upbringing. As one father put it:

Oh we influenced him, my wife and I... We pushed that going to college on him pretty hard...because you need to nowadays. [We] pushed it on him that if you want to do the best in life you've got to get through college

nowadays. Education has been stressed to him his whole life basically...and he wants to do well.

Several mothers said their sons were strongly influenced by the examples set by their fathers. One mother, for example, said her son learned the value of education from her husband who attended college while the children were growing up:

Ah, his dad is a big influence to him... He will come out verbally and say that. He would probably be a different person if his dad had not been part of the household... He's been there to give him support. He can speak with him. He's [set an example]...because his dad got his education when we were already a family and he saw his dad continue...and saw how it benefits having an education without even really pushing it on him... He has taken a lot of the habits his dad has.

Another mother said her son learned the importance of a college degree from her and her husband. She has a college degree and never had a problem finding work. Her husband, however, had few options because he did not have a degree. For her son, this lesson has been reinforced by his own work experiences:

Well, his father does not have a college education so he has kind of seen, you know, that his job opportunities are limited. I have a college degree in education, so...he has seen that I can fairly readily get a job... And from some of the summer jobs he's been working in forestry...he can see the people that are working there with degrees and the people that are working there without degrees... He can see that the ones without degrees are somewhat working at a dead end job.

Although most said their sons work, these parents will intercede if their jobs appear to be distracting them from their schoolwork or longer term goals. As one mother explained, her main concern is her son's education:

My main concern is for him to [finish school]. Everything requires a degree now—in any field that you go into, and he...realizes that is important. So that is my main thing... And if he is concerned about support financially, you know, we would be able to do whatever it is we can to help him with that. He doesn't have to work... He can concentrate on his studies.

Several parents explicitly told their sons, "your job right now is to go to school." In this context, some parents expressed the view that college plans and military service were mutually exclusive paths for their sons. Others worried that military service would postpone or supersede their sons' plans and preparation for meaningful careers.

Accessibility and Communication

The majority of parents whose sons expressed no interest in military service when they were interviewed for YATS, describe healthy relationships with their sons. They seem aware of what is going on in their sons' lives and are accessible to them. From their accounts, most talk with their sons about their interests, future plans, challenges and successes. Even those parents who do not live with their sons seem to have a fairly good sense of what their sons are doing or planning.

From their accounts, these parents attempt to guide their sons through decision-making processes in ways that respect their autonomy. One father, for example, said neither he nor his wife ever pushed their son in the direction of a particular career. However, when their son is making major decisions he usually talks things over with them before he acts. This father's depiction of the relationship that he and his wife have with their son is typical:

I'm not gonna point him in any direction... I mean it's his choice. I think he's got a good head on his shoulders and he can do just about whatever he wants to do and, you know, make a go of it... I give advice...and when it comes down to real serious decisions he always sits down with, you know, my wife and myself and we talk, you know. He's got his views of

things and I mean we try to tell him what we've seen and, in the long run, I'd say 90 percent of the time he kind of listens. But he'll still make up his mind what he thinks is best. And so far it's worked out.

Several parents suggested that fathers exerted less influence than mothers in their households. One mother, for example, said her husband has had little influence on their son because he is "always working." In her words:

My husband hasn't been a big influence... He works a lot, so though I know he has been some type of an influence on my son's life, but he does work a lot through the years and there were times where his shift rotated and he never even got to see him. So I think he has influenced my son, of course, but in a different way than I have... He's a very quiet reserved type person and whereas, you know, I try to expose my kids to people and places and I like to go out and my husband likes to stay home and just do work.

Another father, a minister, said his work requires him to be "so involved in everybody else's lives," that "sometimes [he] is not there for his own family." He described his wife as the "motivator behind their son" and regrets that he is not closer to his children:

[My wife] has always been the one that would help him with his homework and [his career plans]... I love my boys and I help them with things when they come to me and ask for my help. And when our paths cross, I try to give them some good advice and talk with them and let them know that I love them... But it has not been like I thought it would be, like my teenage fantasy of one day being a dad and how I'd have my boys close to me. They are far closer to their mother than they are to me.

Occasionally, his son will drop by his office to talk. Usually, he said, his son is looking more for his approval than his advice. In his words:

Occasionally he will come by and share his thoughts with me...and I try to always stop

what I'm doing and listen to him... Lots of times it's not so much, 'Dad, what would you do?' as 'Dad, I'm doing this,' you know. And I think when he's saying, 'I'm going to do this,' he's really saying, 'I'd really like to have your approval of that, but you know, I'm going to do it anyway.' And if I approve of it, I tell him to go for it... If I don't approve of it, I say, 'son, you might oughta give that some serious thinking,' you know... I try to be honest with him in those decisions.

Most parents said their "advice and wisdom" are not always heeded, but they are fairly certain their sons internalize at least some of it. One father, for example, said his son is a "typical teenager." "He listens, but he acts like he doesn't." A mother, who "stuck to her guns" when it came to her son's education, said she's had the pleasure of hearing him say later, "you know Mom, you were right." In her words:

We have open...good communications. We do have barriers, but it's because he's, you know, 'you don't know today's world.' He thinks I know the 70's world only... I'm not out in the neighborhood. I'm not out in the streets so I don't know anything... But we're able to discuss that... And when it comes down to education... I constantly keep on telling him you need to do your best... When he finished his technical school...he worked in a position that was fairly okay for someone who was 19. He had his own place. He was making money to meet his needs and for a minute there was kind of swaying to stay there [and not transfer to the university] because he had this job... I told him, 'you need to sit back and realize what you're doing, what you're thinking of doing and decide whether it's a long term [goal] that you're going after or a short-term [goal].' ...But they will grumble and grunt and then they think about it... And I've experienced the pleasure of being able to hear, 'you know Mom, you were right... I understand what you were telling me.' [After that] he came home and decided to quit his job and go to the university.

In addition to maintaining open channels of communication with their sons about their education or career interests, these parents also play active roles in facilitating their sons' decisions. A number of parents, for example, said they helped their sons gather information about particular careers and took them around to visit colleges. As one parent described it:

Starting his sophomore year [in high school] we started looking at different schools. We visited several schools [with him]... and he talked to several professors in the college of business... When we'd go on vacation or any kind of travel we'd always check out the local campus just to drive through.

Typical of the parents in this cluster, this father and his wife took their son to visit colleges that specialized in law enforcement, even though they were not "enamored" with that career for their son.

Sons' Exposure to the Military

The majority of parents—veterans and non-veterans alike—whose sons appear to have no interest in military service, have not talked to their sons about the military or encouraged them to consider it. As described earlier, these parents generally do not suggest specific careers, or even career fields, to their sons. It is not surprising then, when they explain that the reason they have not talked to their sons about the military is because "he has never brought it up" or "he doesn't seem interested."

The majority also indicated that their sons had little or no exposure to the military during their formative years. As one father put it: "We're not in the part of the country where there's military bases and stuff. We're not around military families... We're exposed very little to military life."

Nearly all said their sons had one or more relatives who had served in the military, including grandfathers, uncles, aunts and cousins. Very few, however, could recall any conversations

these relatives had with their sons about military service. Many said their sons had little or no contact with these relatives. A few said their sons have contact with relatives who have served, but do not think they have had conversations with them about the military. As one mother put it:

My brother was in the Army... As much as [my brother and son] talk... They don't talk about the military. At least I haven't heard it come up in conversation. [My son]...he tells everybody that he's going to be an attorney, and my brother tells him, you know, 'just go for the gold,' and they don't talk military.

Another mother encouraged her son to talk to her three brothers who served, but thinks their war stories may have frightened him:

I can remember one time saying...you might listen to what [your uncles] are saying about the military. It might be good if there's something there that interests you... And I think part of it in his mind is he associates the military with fighting and he is not an aggressive kid at all... He has no interest in firearms, you know. He's not a hunter, not a fisherman, none of that interests him... I know at family gatherings...if my brothers get talking it's...war stories... So it could be that that's what he associates the military with is fighting.

A few others mentioned that veteran relatives actively discouraged their sons from joining. As one mother explained: "[His relatives that served] have told him do not enter the military... They do not encourage him...when the topic is brought up they say, 'I wouldn't.'"

Parents of sons who appear to have no interest in military service also report little or no recruiter contact. A few parents said their sons participated in JROTC or had one face-to-face conversation with a recruiter. Most, however, only attended a school presentation or spoke briefly with a recruiter over the phone. In large part, recruiter efforts were stopped short because the young men simply were not interested. Several parents mentioned that their sons almost always threw

recruiting materials away without even opening them. As one mother described it:

I think when he got out of high school they were calling him... But he didn't meet with them... I think he talked with them over the phone... I only [know] that his conversations were brief. It was something he was definitely not interested in, so there was nothing he had to say.

Although one father suggested that his wife intercepts calls from recruiters before they reach their son, there was little evidence that other parents obstructed these communications. Even mothers who strongly oppose enlistment for their sons do not express their fears or reservations when a recruiter calls or comes by the house. Again, if it is something their sons are interested in, they will not stand in the way.

Summary

The majority of parents whose sons expressed no interest in military service when they were interviewed for YATS described intact, middle-class family living situations. About one-half of these parents or their spouses served 2-3 years in the military.

These parents described their sons' approaches to careers and the future in mostly rational terms. Many said their sons had specific interests or talents that emerged when they were young. When it came time to plan their futures, then, they sought ways to transform these interests into careers. They spent time thinking about possible careers, gathering information, and gaining experiences before making firm commitments. The majority of parents supported this process and expressed confidence in their sons' abilities to achieve their education and career goals. In large part, this confidence stemmed from beliefs that their sons were making thoughtful decisions and selecting career paths that were meaningful to them.

Most said their sons never showed any interest in the military—not because they were against it, but because it never occurred to them. They speculated that this was because they were never

really exposed to it. Recruiter contact was minimal or non-existent. Many veteran parents and nearly all non-veteran parents said they never talked to their sons about the military or did anything to encourage their sons to consider it. The few parents that were aware that their sons had some interest in the military in the past could not explain its demise. Many said they emphasized the importance of postsecondary education or training in their sons' upbringing. They believe that military service would distract their sons from pursuing their education or training and beginning meaningful careers. However, if their sons chose to enter the military, they would not stand in their way.

Most identified themselves as influential in their sons' development. They describe close family ties and fairly open lines of communication. When it comes to career planning, they explore their sons' interests with them and provide guidance without directing or prescribing the outcomes. Above all else, these parents want their sons to find careers that are interesting or worthwhile to them. In their roles as parents, then, they will do whatever they can to support their sons' efforts to find their niches—even when their goals or the means for achieving them seem impractical or unrealistic.

4. POSITIVE PROPENSITY SONS: PARENT PERSPECTIVES

This chapter presents the perspectives of parents whose sons expressed some propensity for military service when they were interviewed for YATS. These parents comprise about one-half of all parents in the study. As a group, they are less well off than those whose sons are not interested in military service. Also, a larger number of these parents or their spouses served four or more years in the military.

Parents of positive propensity sons also described more diverse perspectives on their sons' overall approaches to the future. Five distinct clusters of parents and their sons emerged during analysis. As summarized below, parents of sons in the first three clusters described their sons' approaches to careers and the future in mostly rational terms. Those in the remaining two clusters, however, did not.

- **Cluster 1: Parents of sons whose primary objective is military service**

These parents and their sons are most like those described in the previous chapter. They are mostly middle-class parents of sons who are approaching the military in much the same way that their age-mates in Chapter 3 are approaching college or careers.

- **Cluster 2: Parents of sons who see military service as a way to get education benefits and achieve social mobility**

These parents are also similar to those in Chapter 3, except they do not have the means to finance their sons' postsecondary education or training. They value education and see the military as one of the few paths that will enable their sons to attend college and get ahead.

- **Cluster 3: Parents of sons who are pursuing careers in the civilian sector**

These are parents of sons who had considered joining the military at the time of the YATS interview, but have since decided against it.

- **Cluster 4: Parents of diffuse decision-makers**

These parents have sons who are either working or attending school, but have not systematically explored their career interests or set realistic long-term goals for themselves. At the time of the YATS survey, they expressed some interest in the military. In most cases, however, they did not express this interest until after the interviewer asked specifically about considerations of the military.

- **Cluster 5: Parents of disconnected youth**

These are parents whose sons are neither attending school nor working, and do not appear motivated to participate in any productive activities, including the military. Like those in Cluster 4, they mentioned the military as a possible destination, but only in response to interviewer probes.

These clusters of parents and their sons are described in more detail below. Although there are some differences across the clusters, where possible the presentations begin with background on the families and their sons' interest or commitment to the military, followed by sections on sources of influence on sons' career decisions, recruiter contact, and perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of military service.

Cluster 1: Parents of Sons Whose Primary Objective Is Military Service

Nearly 20 percent of parents whose sons expressed some propensity for service said joining the military was one of their son's major

objectives in life. Indeed, several reported that their sons were scheduled to enter basic training within a month or so of the in-depth interview. The majority of these parents described their sons' approaches to careers and the future in rational terms, using words like "focused," "persistent," "single-minded," and "stubborn" to describe their decisions to join the military. Many said their sons had expressed an interest in joining at a very young age. As they got older, they began gathering information about the various Services, talking to recruiters, and getting in shape. Several said their sons aspired to professional job assignments inside the military—e.g., to become pilots, intelligence officers, and interpreters, but most aspired to modest assignments—e.g., to become infantrymen, cooks, and mechanics.

The majority of parents of these military-oriented youth reported that their sons gathered information from at least two Services before they decided which one they would pursue. One father, for example, said his son explored all four Services before selecting the Army. Once he made this decision, he was confident that it was the correct one for him:

Well, he's adamant about going in the Army... I'm an ex-Navy guy, [but] I told him to make up his mind what he wanted to do... He done some research into the different branches—Air Force, Marines, Army and Navy... He would buy different books... He likes to read a lot so he would study, you know, and he'd read articles in the local paper about military or ex-military people and stuff like that so I think those all contributed in his decision... He pretty much made up his own mind on that... I think that decision was important to him and I tried to stay out of it as much as I could.

Another veteran father said his son "investigated a number of possibilities" that would enable him to combine his interest in law enforcement with his desire to serve in the military. None of the active Services would guarantee him a slot in the military police, so he decided to join the National Guard. In so doing, he could pursue a criminal justice career and, at the same time, fulfill his desire to serve. If for some reason he finds that he

is not cut out for college, his father said he would "probably go active."

Nearly one-half of the parents said their sons' focus on the military did not waiver—even when they confronted challenges. One father's description of his son's tenacity is typical:

He's persistent and not easily discouraged [when it comes to joining the military]. He's accomplished everything he's ever tried. He sets his goals and he don't give up until he's achieved that... I'm not sure what kind of MOS he wants, but he likes dealing with guns and he likes to cook.

He went on to explain that for years his son hung around the local armory and talked to recruiters from the Army and the Army National Guard. As high school graduation neared, he applied to the Army but was rejected because of his eyesight. His son views this as a "temporary setback," since his condition can be corrected with laser surgery. To afford the surgery, his son has decided to leave a job that he likes and pays well but does not provide health insurance, to take one at a factory in town that does.

Another father whose son has wanted to join the Navy "all his life" said his son failed the entrance exam to the Navy by "two or three points," but is confident that he will continue to take it until he passes:

He's trying to see if he can pass the Navy's exam... He's always been into that... Ever since he was little he has had these plans to join... So he has an interest to take it again... He decided to take up those studies of mechanics because he didn't pass the exam for the Navy by two or three points... He's studying and thinks he will pass it [next time].

Most of the parents described obstacles their sons felt empowered to overcome. Several, however, said the problems emanated from the military itself—in particular, from recruiters who were unwilling or unable to work with their sons who were highly motivated to join, but had specific career interests they wanted to pursue. One mother's story is illustrative:

[When it comes to flying] he's a very focused individual. From the time he was like seven or eight years old I think just being around the bases and the planes...he just always wanted to do it. I mean he knew things when he was very young. He started reading those books and I mean he could tell you everything... He decided he wanted to get his private pilot's license ...before he was 16... We told him you can do that...you have our permission, but we're not going to pay for it. And so when he turned 16, he went out that day, got a job application and within a week he had a job and he accomplished that. He got his private pilot's license within a year... I guess what really impressed us about all this was that he obviously wanted his license because he worked as much as he possibly could whenever anybody needed somebody... Now he's going for his flight instructor rating so then he can go ahead and be a flight instructor and start teaching... [That way he'll be] making a little bit more money and going to school at the same time.

She described her son as "very patriotic" and said he believes it is the duty of every American to serve their country—"not just something you do because it fits in your plans." Throughout his life, she said her son has wanted to combine his interest in flying with this desire to serve his country. Despite his obvious motivation and accomplishments, however, a recruiter told him there were no guarantees that he could fly after he joined. She thinks he will eventually join. However, unless they can offer him at least a 50 percent chance of getting a pilot's slot, she hopes that he will complete his undergraduate studies first. In that way, she said, "if he cannot fly, he would at least be going in as an officer."

Sources of Influence

Parents of sons with a major interest in joining the military identified two major influences on their sons' career decision-making: 1) exposure to the military or military lifestyle during their formative years, and 2) themselves. Most said their sons had a few close friends who shared their interests. However, they tended to be "independent" or "bookish," and not easily

influenced by peers. A few mentioned relatives or others who contributed to their emotional well being or moral development, but for the most part exerted little influence on their sons' career decision-making. As one father put it:

He keeps to himself quite a bit. He's got some friends that he had back, you know, from grade school, but not a whole lot of friends... So friends, other relatives and the church were influences, but nowhere near as strong as parental influence.

Exposure to the military. Most said their sons had early and positive exposure to the military, which inspired a desire to join at a very young age. Some grew up in military families; others lived in close proximity to military installations. They depicted their own roles in the formation of their sons' career goals as mostly non-prescriptive and supportive. Rather than steer their sons toward specific careers or career paths, they encouraged their sons to explore their interests and gather information. They served as role models and sounding boards, and helped their sons gain access to information and other resources that could help them make good decisions.

One military wife said that neither she nor her husband attempted to influence their son to pursue one career or career path over another. The fact that he chose to enlist in the military and follow in his father's footsteps was entirely his decision:

Well, you might think this odd, but we never told our kids this is what you'll do when you grow up... We've always wanted them to choose a direction that they wanted to go. So in other words, I haven't raised my son to be a great athlete. I haven't raised him to be a doctor. Our expectations of our kids is to live the way God wants us to and pursue a job that will raise a family and they're happy with... He always wanted to be in the Armed Forces...ever since he was little. I don't know if it's because his father has been in the military for 20 years... We're happy with his decision [to join the Marines], but I don't think I or my husband knowingly influenced him to join.

Another military wife, who described her family's experiences in the military as "very positive," also thinks her son was influenced by his exposure to the military way of life during his formative years:

I think [my son was influenced in his decisions] by simply just living the military lifestyle. It being something that he knows. And one thing that I'm happy about is he's considering the military service, but ...he's considering other things too... I don't want any kid to join the military because they think that's all they can do... I don't want anyone to do anything because of that... So I think just living the military lifestyle and trying to show him [his options].

Looking back, she is grateful that they lived off base when their son was growing up because it showed him a wider range of options. If her son chooses to enter the military, she said, it would not be because he was unaware of other possibilities. In her words:

This may sound strange, but not living on base was really a positive...because it showed [our son] other things... It got him away from the military cocoon... He met people from the military and civilian sides, whether in Europe or in the United States... I think that it opened up his options a little more.

Another mother speculates that her son's lifelong fascination with military hardware and his father's Service career probably played some role in her son's decision to enlist:

He always wanted to be in the Armed Forces ever since he was little. Always... He grew up on military bases. One base he really loved... He was so little, though...two or three years old, but it's amazing how he remembers. He loved looking at the big tanks crossing the road. He was just in awe or we'd go to another base and he loved seeing the helicopters, airplanes, tanks... He enjoyed it a lot.

She was not surprised, when her son joined the Marines after high school. However, she was careful to point out that he did not just "jump in

and join." Since he grew up on military bases, he had a good sense of what life in the military would be like. He also talked to recruiters and asked his father questions. On his own, he worked hard to lose weight and get in shape before he went to the recruitment office to enlist.

Parents. Parents of sons whose major objective was to join the military described mostly positive relationships with their children and relatively open channels of communication. In the context of these relationships, they attempted to guide their sons through decision-making processes in ways that respected their sons' autonomy. One mother, for example, described their family as a "talking family." They always eat dinner together and "talk about everything," including their son's thoughts and plans for his future. Occasionally, she said, her son tells them he is not ready to discuss a particular topic with them yet and they respect that.

Nearly all the parents in this cluster said they encouraged their sons to "research their options," but left the actual decisions entirely up to them. In general, they said this led to reasonably well thought out and informed decisions that they could easily support. One mother's depiction of the role she and her husband played in their son's decision-making is illustrative:

We encouraged information gathering... We just didn't want him to make a decision that he had not thought through and get up there and not be able to handle it. So it's like we always, you know, would test him.. We'd ask questions in different ways... The Army was something that he stayed with and his reasons seemed to be good. Every time that we asked him questions...he did the homework to get the answers... [He showed us that] this was just something that he was sure of.

Another father, whose son was keen on joining one of the Armed Forces, also helped his son gather information, but was careful to let his son make his own decisions:

You know, you have to be careful how you influence your kids because sometimes you can be accused of mother henning them or

whatever, you know, and making decisions for them, and I've tried not to do that... But I think I've [helped in ways] that would have some influence on him... He just met a guy I was in the Service with who retired [from the Navy]. As a parent, you try to expose your child to any influences that...are positive.

A mother said both she and her husband contributed to their son's career decision-making, albeit in different ways. She taught her son to get information and ask questions before making decisions. Her husband taught him to "be persistent and very disciplined in everything he does." Also, he was an officer, so their son "had a chance to see him at work and that influenced him a lot."

Recruiter Contact

Compared to all others in this study, parents in the "military is primary objective" cluster had the most contact with recruiters. They also expressed the strongest opinions about recruiters, which were often less than positive. Some were merely frustrated by recruiters who did not respond adequately to the questions they asked. One father, for example, said he and his wife were frustrated in their efforts to get a few "straight answers" out of the man who had recruited their son to join the Army:

I don't know how my son felt, but from his mom's standpoint, and my standpoint, we were a little bit concerned about not getting some information that we were curious about. [It got to the point where we were trying to grill him]...but we just couldn't get the information we wanted... My wife, more so than I, she was not very satisfied with some of the answers she got. Or lack of answers I should say... All she really wanted to know was how we could contact our son once he goes to basic.

A few other parents described similar experiences. For most, however, the major concern was that they could not trust a process that encourages recruiters to use any means necessary to recruit youth to their Service, including making promises they have no intention of honoring. One mother

said her son's first contact with a recruiter was at school. Following this initial contact, he gathered information and then went up to the recruiting station. She said her husband did not trust recruiters because "they'll promise anything to get kids to join." So after his first visit, she, her husband and son talked about the sort of questions he might research before the recruiter pressed him into a decision:

One of the things my husband told him and I told him was to check out the Air Force and the Navy and make sure he is going to the Service that's the one that best fits his needs and his personality and what he wants to do... And so he went back and investigated that. I mean everything that we've suggested that he do as far as research he's gone back and asked them questions... Well, number one, give him the best educational benefits and make sure he qualifies for what he wants to do.

She and her husband reviewed all the materials her son collected from the various Services and before their son signed any papers, father and son together met with the recruiter. She was disappointed that she was not able to attend:

Of course we read through all the books, and we got some tapes and all that stuff...paperwork he brought home... I didn't get to talk to the recruiter...but my husband did—my son and him talked to him together and my husband relayed the information to me... I was a little bit disappointed that they didn't make sure that I was involved, but it was a matter of timing... I didn't feel like it was absolutely necessary that I be there. But like I said we went over everything when I got back and I thought it went well.

Her husband was "okay with it" after meeting with the recruiter. However, he did advise his son not to sign anything that did not articulate clearly his understanding of the terms and conditions of his assignment:

After [meeting with the recruiter], my husband just told him when he went up there again not to sign up unless he was real sure he had checked everything... And he said

anything that's not in writing is not so... Make sure anything that you believe is going to happen, you make sure it's in writing because sometimes, you know, people may say things trying to sell you something that may not be so.

Another mother said her years in the military taught her not to trust recruiters:

Because we're a military family we know certain things... [Anything they tell you], if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is... When I was going in they said you can...get paid to...live off base if you want. Well, that's true, but they don't tell you the other part where you have to be a certain rank...married or whatever.

In her estimation, the recruiters her son talked to were equally deceptive:

Although I'm skeptical about what kind of information [recruiters] give, I'm sure we encouraged him to go see the recruiters and get information at various times because he had talked about joining... [And sure enough] one of the things that happened with this Navy guy he said in the nuclear power program you get an enlistment bonus and you'll get to take part in the Navy College Fund which is over \$40,000 worth of college money and this and that. Well okay, so I went to the Navy website and I started digging into that. Well, you don't get both of those things—you get either/or.... And when I asked him about that because he came again...he said, well, you know, you're right... You can either take the enlistment bonus or you can choose a \$40,000 Navy College Fund and it costs you nothing. I said, 'well, it cost you that enlistment bonus...' And he goes, 'well, that's one way to look at it.' So it's those kind of things I think that being in the military you're able to look out for.

She said she never tried to hide her distrust for recruiters from her son. This bothered him initially, but in time he understood:

[My son] is aware of how we feel about the recruiters. In fact, it's kind of funny because of what'll happen is...like I said he always gets mad at me...and says 'you're gonna find something wrong.' Well, you don't have to try that hard for that (laughs)...and then what's exciting is when he finds it...and then he's just looking at you with this little smile on his face, like oh-oh... But you know they say things to recruit people... And there were some things this guy said that weren't lies, but they weren't the whole truth either... It's that you have to find out certain things before you can understand what is really going on.

Gradually, she said, he is learning why I say "don't trust anything a recruiter tells you that's not in writing."

Benefits and Drawbacks of Military Service for Sons

In general, these parents were confident that their sons could find a satisfying life and career in the military. In part, their confidence was grounded in their own experiences in the military. Also, they knew it was something their sons were motivated to do and had the sort of disposition that would enable them to fit in and succeed.

When asked to describe the benefits of the military for their sons, these parents inevitably mentioned opportunities for them to establish their independence in a supportive environment. One mother who served four years in the Air Force, for example, described the formative role that the military played in her own development:

One of the pluses for [my son] would be exactly what I had... It was a good way for me to get out of the house and build a life for myself, but still have a structure around me—something that kind of protects you. You're safe, you have everything you need...so you're able to get out on your own little by little...rather than being thrown out there and not having anything or anyone to kind of talk to you and guide you in any decision. I think that's a very strong plus.

Similarly, another father said: “It will be a good experience for [my son]. He’ll learn how to do things on his own and take care of himself.”

Nearly all said the military would provide their sons with opportunities to “see the world,” “experience other cultures,” and “get them out of their own little bubbles.” They also mentioned the excellent education benefits and training that the military provides, though a few mentioned that these benefits were subordinate to service. One mother, for example, said her husband—who was a mechanic in the Army for 20 years—stressed to their son that his primary responsibility would be to fight for his country, not get an education:

Even though my son wants to go in the military for the tuition benefits, my husband stressed to him that many people just join for that. He told him, though, you have to understand you’re in the military and you’re going to fight for your country... So he’s grown up with that and...if something does happen I think my son will have a good attitude because he’s been brought up that way.

The most common drawback of military service for their sons would be getting an assignment that was not consistent with their occupational goals. However, only a small number of parents mentioned this. None mentioned war as a drawback. When asked whether it was a concern a few said they felt that serving your country is an honor and if it means going to war, then that is your duty. One father added that this holds “only if it’s a justified war...not a mess like Vietnam where young men were sacrificed for no reason.” Most parents, however, said that if the United States went to war, like any parent, they would be concerned. As one seasoned veteran explained:

Yeah, yeah...I think that’s a concern that anybody...any parent...would have. I guess there’s not a whole lot you can do about it. When you join the military, you just go wherever they send you... I don’t think it would really bother [my son] very much. Not as much as his mother and me... It’s a lot of uncertainty, I guess. We haven’t discussed that very much, the three of us anyway.

Cluster 2: Parents of Sons Who See Military Service as a Way to Get Education Benefits and Achieve Social Mobility

Another cluster of parents view the military as one of the few paths open to their sons to further their education after high school and, more generally, “get ahead.” Most of these parents have little or no education beyond high school and work hard, but remain “poor” or “just barely making it.” Above all else, they believe that education is the key to success. Without it, their sons are destined to lead the same difficult lives they have known. However, they lack the financial resources needed to put their sons through school. These parents and their sons, then, are attracted to the tuition benefits that are available through service in one of the Armed Forces.

One parent described the military as “one way for poor people to get their children educated.” Another said the military was “a great source of opportunity for African Americans to further their education and get jobs that pay well.” Another, a father of four with less than eight years of formal schooling, said “I’m sorry... I can’t afford [college for my children]... So I’m going to have at least two children gone to the Army—my first son and my daughter.”

Nearly all said their sons had specific career goals that preceded their interest in the military. For these young men and their parents, interest in the military arose mainly in the context of a way to finance the education they needed to pursue these other goals. According to one mother whose son would like to pursue a professional career in the health services field, for example:

I would have liked him to go straight to college... He wants to have some sort of medical career... [But] we’re not even a middle-class family... Money is an issue. So I like the way [my son] said ‘I can get money [for college] through the Navy.’ Like I said, the biggest idea of going in the Navy for us was college money.

She said his interest in the medical field emanated from a job he had at a local hospital:

He had a job in a cancer ward... He would just beam when he came home. He'd say, you know, 'you have to see this little woman.' And there was just such a trueness in what he saw and that he loved it. He loved the environment... whether it was 'could you please set my tray up' or just that feeling he got from being able to help. He loved it.

A recruiter told her son that he needs to lose 20 pounds before he would qualify for the Navy. She is prepared to do whatever she can to help him lose that weight and enlist:

I'll support him in anyway I can to [realize]...his dream of going in the Navy... I'm glad he's not saying, 'well, I'm done with high school and I'm done with all my education, and I'm not going to worry about pursuing anything else.' I mean, a lot of kids [around where we live] just leave and think that's it.

Another mother, who has cancer and is disabled, said her son was gifted in foreign languages but needed grants to help him finance his education. When he expressed an interest in the military she supported him because it would help him reach his goals and get him out of the small town where there are few positive opportunities for young people:

He wants [eventually] to get a masters' degree in languages or computers... He hasn't decided which... And he's going to need grants and he figured the best way to do it is to go through the military... So it will help [him] reach a higher goal instead of just saying, you know, 'we live in this [poor small town], but there is something more out there for me than what is here.'

She would like him to go into the Service right away, but he wants to complete two years of community college first so that he "doesn't have to start at the bottom." She also said he wants to get married, but not before he has established himself in a "serious career."

Myself, I'd like to see him go in right now because he could get his education... But he wants to get his German down and he wants to get done with some Spanish classes so he doesn't have to start, as he calls it, the grunt work way down at the bottom [when he gets in]. I told him we all start there... But I think he might like to be an officer maybe.

Yet another father said his son's interest in the military began in his early teens as a result of his participation in a quasi-military youth organization. His interest persisted. As he got older, however, he became more focused on the education benefits:

I think he sees his future starting right there in the Army... He's excited about it... He says he qualifies for \$15,000 for college... So I think he'll make it [to college]. And he's still young, you know, but the age he come out of the Army it will be 22. And if he doesn't like it, then he can do something else. I know he's going to go to college. I know he's going to go, he can make it after four years he's qualified for that and he can do whatever he wants to do after that.

Sources of Influence

Parents in this "education and social mobility cluster" mentioned multiple sources of influence on their sons' career decision-making. In addition to themselves, they mentioned teachers and friends among those who helped shape their sons' thinking about the future.

The largest number of parents in the "education and social mobility" cluster identified themselves as major influences in their son's lives. Above all else, they stressed to their sons the values of education and hard work in their efforts to push their sons beyond their own limited stations in life. One mother said her son saw how much she and her husband struggled to get by. They did not hesitate to tell their children that "this doesn't have to be [their] chosen path." In her words:

We just sit down and share with [our children]... I tell them, 'yes, we're making a living for ourselves, but it's not easy.' And

we share some of the negatives and hardness of our own lives so that our kids can grab on to some resources available... His father will sit down and say to them, 'I didn't go to college, I didn't finish high school, I didn't see all the opportunities that were there and they passed me by... I have to get up at 6 a.m. and work really hard to make a living.'

Despite all these talks, however, this mother worries that her boys might see their father as a successful person because he always comes home from work in good spirits. "That concerns me," she said. "I want more for them than what we have." She said it is hard to get that message across without "downgrading their father."

One mother was "surprised, but happy" that her son wanted to go into the Service to pay for his education because he "isn't really an adventurer, but more of a homebody." Although he is still in high school, she worries that he may just graduate from high school, get a job and maybe join a gym. Since the time when he first saw the Navy recruitment ad in the magazine and said, "look at this Ma...this is great," she worries that his enthusiasm is waning. As she explained:

He gets real optimistic... He really thinks the Navy is his answer to being a starting point for him and he envisions, you know, having a real good savings account, having a nice home, a job he loves, being able to come home for visits and see everyone... [But] he made it sound simple initially and now I think he's concerned with what it will be like, you know. I think he's past the part of simplifying it and now it's a real concern with what will the Navy be like... And I'm going to have to leave home, you know, all those things are going through his head.

There are days, she said, when it seems like "the drive to join is out of him." She works hard to support him and "keep him motivated." As she put it:

I'll support him in any way I can as far as the weight loss and his dream of going in the Navy... The role I'm going to play [this summer] is to be very supportive with him

getting to the gym and doing what he has to do... That's the immediate plan. Helping him to learn to eat low fat, that's a big role I can play now, encouraging him to always, you know, keep going forward, do what you have to do, go for walks with him. Hands-on support as far as that goes because it is hard for him. It really is.

Another father said his son has always known what he wants and is pretty good at making his own decisions. Nevertheless, he offers advice. His son listens, and uses whatever pieces of it he finds useful:

He makes his own decisions...and he comes to us the best way he can to say 'dad, I'm going to do this and then this and then this... We try to help him and give him all the support... He likes it when I say something, when he asks me something and I explain it the best I can do... And I tell him like if he wants my advice... That's my advice. And he take it... He just be quiet and, you know, he thinks a while and he takes whatever he thinks is good... The rest he just throw them away.

One mother said her son is a planner and a doer, and shares little with her or his friends until he is ready to execute his plans. He does confide, however, in a college instructor who has taught him that everything in the world is not black or white:

He's real closed mouthed on some things. He doesn't even talk with his mom or his friends. He doesn't volunteer... He has a general idea, but he won't tell the details until he's got it all figured out... When it's almost time then he'll let you know... But he does have this college instructor who teaches critical thinking... And she's like a sounding board for him... She is open-minded and [my son] really enjoys that. I know they've had discussions, but...he won't tell me what they're about... But it has influenced his thinking about a few things... Like not everything is black and white, some things are gray.

She would like to be more of a sounding board for him, but realizes that he is growing up and she needs to let go:

The role I would like to play is being his sounding board... I found out some things and I might agree or disagree, but I tell him I'd look it up, find out exactly what kind of information he needs to make decisions. And he's done that a couple times, but mostly on little things... But not so much the last year... It's hard to let go because I know he's growing up. He's almost 20 and it's kind of like when do I cut the apron strings? Sometimes I tell him 'you have a long ways to go to be a grown up. Just because of age, just because you are 20 doesn't make you a grown up.' It's hard to let go... And I said it's when you finally grow up, it's not the mistakes you make, it's what you do with your mistakes that makes you a grown up.... Whether you wallow in it or just say, okay, I can't do that anymore and do something else.

All but one of the parents in the "education and social mobility" cluster described their sons' friends as "pretty good people." Several mentioned particular ways that they influenced their sons. For example, one mother who described her son as a "real homebody" said his friends motivate him to get out and do things.

My son and his friends have a lot in common. I think he gets encouraged by his friends... I think the influence he gets from them might be to get up and get moving, you know. He has a best friend who is a real doer. And he encourages my son with his weight and lifting weights with him, and he's got a lot of positive atmosphere with his friends. How they directly influence him I think is to keep him going, you know. Not letting him give up. Even on days he wants to just say, forget it. Like when the [recruiter] told him he had to lose weight...his self esteem, I think, was just blown apart because they said you're not physically ready to go in the Navy... I think it really dashed his self esteem and...his friends and me had to jump in and say 'you can do this, you can do this.'

Recruiter Contact

The majority of parents in the "education and social mobility" cluster are aware that their sons have had contact with recruiters. In fact, all but one said their sons initiated the contact. One mother said her son filled her in on what the recruiter said he needed to do to qualify. To her knowledge, the recruiter never followed up with her son. "Only your company of surveyors have called frequently, and I thought at times it was the recruiter trying to reach my son." Another parent said his son's recruiter "came by the house a few times" and took him out on "fun adventures." As he described it, this opportunity to observe them positively interact with his son made him feel good about his son's decision to join:

[The recruiter] has been to my house a few times... They go to the movies, the car race... I don't know if they're all like that...but they became good friends. You know, 'come on let's go do this and come on with us and we pay for all this stuff and have fun with us.' Things like that make me in a way feel good because, you know, I start to trust them... I don't mean I don't trust them, but you know, it's just that they're going to take my son away...[and I want to know they care about him]... You know, it's like 'hey, this is my son,' you know.

Although the recruiter also talked to the father, these interactions were less satisfying:

[The recruiter] gave us a call and he ask if it was okay to talk about [my son] and I said, 'well yeah, why not?' I mean if it's something he's going to do, let's talk about it. I want to find out things too... So I did talk to him, but you know, he just always said 'the Army is the Army and you've got to do whatever they say no matter what.' He [also told me] 'if you're going to live in the world, you've got to go. If you don't somebody's got to go. We've got to defend our country... So once you join the Army if war or something is going to happen, it's going to happen and somebody's got to go.' And that's about it.

The father did ask about illicit drug use in the Army and the recruiter assured him that there were no drugs in the military at all:

I ask him is there any drugs in the Army. He said no. So that was one thing I ask him and, you know, I said, 'well, I don't want my son go over there and, you know, start doing drugs because all this you see on television... Any way, I ask him the question, he says 'no, there is no drugs at all.'

None of the other parents mentioned personal contact with recruiters.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Military Service for Sons

None of the parents in the "education and social mobility" cluster had served in the military. One mother applied in the 1970s because she wanted to travel and get a career, but she could not meet the weight requirements. She and several others had parents or brothers who served. The majority, however, have had conversations with military personnel and are aware of education opportunities and other benefits of service.

In the eyes of these parents, education and training are the greatest benefits of military service for their sons. One father who immigrated to the United States from Mexico in his late teens said he talked to some friends who had served in the military and influenced his thinking about the benefits of the military for his son:

I talked to a friend who's been in the Army for 20 years and some other guys who have been in the Marines for five, six years... They gave me some ideas about the [benefits for my son]... This man whose been in the Army 20 years, he say you go to Army, you know, it's like you already made it... Above everything...there's college and all that stuff...and you can retire in 20 years... And you don't have to come up with any down payment when you want to buy a house... And you travel a lot... You go a lot of places and you meet a lot of people and they take care of you.

Several other parents mentioned the same list of benefits—i.e., education and training, opportunities to travel, steady incomes, and job security. One mother, for example, stressed the education and training benefits of military service to her son. Other benefits included travel and discipline:

The most important benefit, of course, is it will pay for his higher education. He's interested in languages and computers... I told him you have to find something that you will enjoy doing the rest of your life... I told him, you know, if nothing else go into the Service and find out what you want to do... There is lots of different kinds of training. They will give you tests and find out what you do very well and if nothing else you will have a job...and you will have a skill. You'll have your living expenses paid for, you can travel if you want to, but it is a good experience because it is good training for discipline for yourself. And he needs structure up to a point...because he is 19 and he thinks nothing will stop him.

The same mother said she hopes her son finds something he enjoys doing. She thinks he would enjoy the military because "it is very precise and that is just the way he is." "He's always been that way," she said. "If he can't do it well, he doesn't like to do it at all. She also said her son is a leader and thinks he may have a hard time following orders:

I think the hardest thing for him in the military [would be taking orders]... If he doesn't like the way something's done, boy, he'll tell everybody. He'll growl about it... He always can figure out an angle about how to do something better... But he's learning that he has to follow orders. The more he works, the more he understands that, hey, somebody's higher up. I've got to do this. I'm the peon so I've got to clean up. He'll do it, but he doesn't like to do it.

Although one mother mentioned specifically that war was not one of her concerns in terms of her son's intentions to enlist, several other parents said that it was. One mother's concern was

typical: “One drawback is if we went to war... I wouldn’t want anything to happen to him while he’s gone.” Another described war as “every mother’s dilemma.” Although one father said that everyone has been telling him that “we’re not going to have a war right now,” he thinks “you never can tell” what might happen. It worries him that his son might be sent to “Korea or one of those places to fight,” but it worries his wife even more.

Only one mother mentioned that her son might have “problems leaving home.” The majority said their sons were ready to strike out on their own. As parents, however, they are anxious about the separation. One father, for example, is afraid that his son’s years in the military will permanently alter the comfortable relationship they have developed over the years. In many respects, he is not ready to admit that his son is growing up:

I’m happy...that he’s doing what he wants to do, but I really don’t want him to go... I’m going to miss him very much.... He’s 18 years old, but we’ve been together all the time like friends and I feel sad about it... I like for him to stay with us, you know. I know one day he will go. He will get married and separate any way. But I wish he stay here with us... Talk to us, play his Nintendo, play his computers and all this stuff, and he stay with us. But right now he’s going to be different... When he goes to the Army he’s going to change his life totally, you know, from one day to the next... I’m not going to be there to look after him.

Another mother described the drawbacks of the military for her son as entirely selfish:

I would hate to be left here by myself... I like having him in my life. We want him to settle here... I’d like to make sure he doesn’t find a wife while he’s away from Texas... I want him to marry somebody here so he’ll be around us and the grandbabies will be around us... But for his welfare, it would be better if he did do something like go in the Service.

Cluster 3: Parents of Sons Who Are Pursuing Careers in the Civilian Sector

A third cluster of parents is composed of those whose sons expressed positive propensity for military service when they were interviewed for YATS, but subsequently decided to pursue other activities in the civilian sector. Many said the military was one of several options their sons considered during high school. Some said their sons had specific interests that they thought they could pursue in either sector, such as law enforcement, instrumental music and engineering. However, when they learned that they might not get job assignments in the military that would enable them to pursue their interests, they eliminated it as an option. As these parents explained, their sons are goal oriented. They will consider different paths for achieving those goals, but once they make a decision “there’s no stopping them.” One mother, for example, said her son is intent on pursuing a career in music performance and education. She said he came “awful close” to joining when a Navy recruiter “promised” him a spot in the band. When it turned out that the recruiter could not guarantee a spot for him, however, he elected to go to college instead. Although she would have supported his decision to join—“if that’s what he wanted to do”—she was relieved that he did not. In her words:

He thought about joining the Navy and got awful close... He was really enthusiastic...and I thought, gee, we just lost him... We held our breath... He could have signed up without our permission. And he’d already also applied to colleges and we had thought he was heading toward college and suddenly some recruiter promised him a spot in the band... I think in the back of his mind he knew...it’s a matter of hit or miss whether or not there is a position open for a trombone player in any of the key bands in the military. And I think if he...knew that there was a position open...and he’s got confidence that he could get the position, I think he’ll do it.

A father said his son had at one time expressed interest in becoming either a Navy Seal or a police officer. For reasons that the father could not explain, his son decided to attend college and study law enforcement instead. Another father said he once thought his son would continue the family's tradition of military service, but ultimately decided that he was far more interested in studying engineering.

Many of the remaining parents in this cluster, however, said their sons opted to pursue careers without the benefits of a college education or service in the military. A father explained that his son's plans for college and military service fell to the wayside when his girlfriend became pregnant. According to this father, his son decided to pursue a management career at a local restaurant so he could remain near his girlfriend and child. A mother, whose husband retired from the Air Force, said her son is very happy with his job at a local factory. She would like him to enroll in classes at the local community college and "better himself," but says he is not interested. She would also support him if he decided to join the military "if that's what he wanted to do." "Anything that's positive," she said, "I'll be there with him...100 percent."

Sources of Influence

Most parents of sons who had considered military service, but chose to pursue interests or opportunities in the civilian sector, were not sure who influenced their sons' plans for the future. A few thought they had influenced their sons—at least during their formative years. As one mother who grew up in a military family explained:

Well, I would hope that I've had some influence over my sons' decisions to do what they did. I tried to set a good example. I told them that I thought they should go to college. I went to work for the first time when the first one went away to school so that I could help put them through college. I did not want him to have to look to the military, in particular, for any financial help that was offered. I just don't want them to feel that they have to go that way to be able to do what they want to do... I mean the oldest one is working...as an

engineer...for some kind of aircraft arsenal or something and he is still connected...to the Department of Defense in some way. It's not that I have anything against [the military]. I just want them to have the choice.

Now that her son is in college, however, she thinks his friends hold the most sway:

I don't think we have a whole lot of influence right now, except for helping to pay the college bills to keep him where he's at. I think he's very conservative... He seems to be now and I really think that's because of his friends.

Along the same lines, another parent thought he modeled the virtues of hard work and sacrifice for his son. However, now that his son is "grown," he thinks his friends are more influential:

I've tried to be an example to [my children]... Although I did not go to college...I feel like I've accomplished quite a bit in the years that I've been grown. I think I've accomplished, you know, other than a family, I've been a good provider... I've bought property and buildings and things like this trying to show them that you can get ahead...by sacrificing... [Now]...he seems to be more influenced...by his friends—his peers that are interested in the same things as he is. Those are the only things I can really see that impress him a lot [now]... There's several of them that wanna go to the same school. So they probably talk about it a lot together and influence each other.

This father, a veteran, said he talked to his son about his experiences in the military and thinks it would "not be a bad way" for him to go. From his account, however, these talks appear to be more monologues than dialogs, and more discouraging than uplifting:

I talked to him about the military... I made my career in the military and my father was before me also, but I don't think [my son's] headed in that direction... I guess I haven't influenced him much... I told him that from my experience the military way is not easy...

You have to do this, this, and this. You have to do it that way when they tell you... I don't get much feedback from him. He just listens I guess. I suppose it might have influenced him a little, but he didn't really tell me that it did or not. So I guess I don't talk to him a lot... So I don't get a lot of feedback from him. I figure he's a grown man now and, you know, he can make his own decisions.

Many other parents in this cluster described somewhat distant relationships with their sons at this stage in their lives. Many, particularly those who are not very well off, think their rights to advise are limited since they cannot help their sons financially. One father, a veteran, said he has little influence on his son's plans because he "doesn't have any [money] to help" cover educational expenses. His son is working to pay his own tuition at a highly specialized technical college. In the words of another who retired from the Service after 20 years:

I don't have much of a role [in my son's career decisions]... I mean, I don't have any financial support, you know, that can help him out... There's not anything I can do other than that... He's got to find his own way.

Recruiter Contact

The majority of parents whose sons had considered the military but seemed to be pursuing other paths, were aware that recruiters had contacted their sons. However, they could not say much about the nature or substance of these contacts. As one father put it: "His last year of high school a lot of recruiters called...but I don't think he really went down to talk to them." Another only observed that his son's enthusiasm for joining the military plummeted after he talked to a recruiter:

He was talking about [joining] pretty strongly... One of the sergeants from school come and talk to him and I'm thinking he was getting ready to join and then the next time it sort of just went down to nothing.

Another only knew that his son, who had expressed interest in joining, felt harassed by

recruiters and eventually told them just to leave him alone and "that was that." Yet another described a recruiter's tactics as "underhanded," because he took her under-age son on a day trip in his car without her permission.

Cluster 4: Parents of Diffuse Decision-makers

Diffuse decision-makers are youth who generally are working or attending school, but have not systematically explored their career interests or set realistic long-term goals for themselves. About one-third of the parents of youth who expressed positive propensity for military service described their sons' approach to careers or the military in these terms. The majority of these parents are lower middle class or working poor; several mentioned that they lived in economically distressed areas. About half served in the military 20 or more years ago, or have immediate family members and close friends who had served. However, they were quick to point out that their knowledge of the military was "outdated" or limited in other ways.

From the accounts of several parents in the "diffuse decision-makers cluster," it is apparent that their sons' approaches to the future are a function of their youthful enthusiasm for diverse subjects or glamorous careers. Some are comfortable with this, understanding that it is "just a stage" in their sons' development. The outlook of a father whose son aspires to become a rap star is typical:

I think when you're 18 years old...that your first plan is always the greatest plan of all times... He has dreams of greatness, you know, in music...rap. I try to explain to him that his chances are better of being a doctor or lawyer than being, you know, like a great superstar, you know. Something more realistic... I mean, cause you know it's only "x" amount of performers, but it's millions of doctors and lawyers, you know. So I think for him to become one of those is greater. And I just try to let him see that, you know, and let him make his own decisions... But he's doing some one-dimensional thinking. He doesn't

have a back up plan, which he's going to need real, real soon... Maybe life will teach him within the next couple of years what is good for him and what is not... I see the real world just slapping him right in his face because the roles that the life that he want to lead ...as a rap star...are not very good. The chances of you becoming that are, you know, it's like winning the lotto or something.

A few other parents described their sons' approaches to career decision-making as less "dreamy" and more "flighty" or "unfocused." A mother who "dropped to her knees and thanked God" when her son graduated from high school said she is happy that her son is at least enrolled in a community college program and working. In school, he is taking a mish-mash of classes, including police science, auto mechanics and physical education. "He's very unfocused," she said. "He's learning more about what he doesn't want to do, than what he wants to do." All things considered, though, she sees that as progress.

Similarly, another mother described her son as "very unfocused." She is anxious to support her son, but he jumps from one interest to another, making it difficult for her to know where he's at or where he's going on any particular day:

He likes to do many things... Sometimes he says different things about like what he wants to do... [Then] I think he knows what he wants, but he really doesn't. So it's kind of hard [to say where he's headed]. One day he wants something, the next time it's something different.

Like this mother, nearly one-half of the parents in the diffuse decision-makers cluster thought their sons were preparing to join the military. Like so many other things they started, however, they did not follow through. As one mother explained:

He told me that he had talked to the Army National Guard...when he was in school... They were talking to them and he got very interested in it... He just told me cause right now see, his friends are in the Service... So then he decided to go with them cause he wanted to do something with his life, you

know... [But] instead he's working as a deli clerk now at Stop & Go... Maybe he'll go in to the Service in a couple of years... He needs to grow up first... Right now he likes everything handed to him.

She and her husband are very poor. She hopes—and believes—that her son will eventually join the Service, go to college, or do something positive with his life.

Another mother, who wished her son had more "drive," said he has started doing things for the first time "without my nagging." Recently, she said, he took his physical for the Army and got an application for the community college. She thinks he's coming around because he sees that he cannot get all the things he wants with his little paycheck from Red Lobster:

He's started doing things on his own for maybe the first time without me nagging so much because he wants to get ahead... He wants to do different things and he wants to make more money. He went and took the physical for the Army and he's in perfect shape... Everybody was waiting for him to decide what he was going to do... But when the decision came to do it he wasn't 100 percent sure and he said, 'whenever I'm ready, I'll join.' ...He also went to [the community college] to find out what he has to do... He did it on his own. He hasn't done anything about it afterwards, but at least he went there and found out, you know... And that took me by surprise... I said, 'wow, I didn't nag him for a while and now he's doing it.' So maybe I have to nag, but then stop and see. If nothing moves then nag a little more, but I think he's maturing and trying to do things on his own and trying to get ahead.

Although she is still not sure what it is that he wants, she is delighted that he is beginning to explore his options.

Another, who also depicted her son as "flighty" when it comes to career interests, said she was happy that he was at least working until he lands on something he might stick to. As she tells it,

many young people in her neighborhood pursue illegal careers:

He tries something and then quits and goes on to something else... [But at least] he's working... A lot of guys around here don't even like to work. Don't want to work. They want to do other things to earn their money, you know. And at least I always know that he's earning it honest and fair.

Compared to mothers, fathers of diffuse sons appear less patient:

I can tell you clear...at this moment he don't get so far on the future... He talks about ...many different things...I think he all the time is still thinking about what he's going to be today, not what he's going to be tomorrow. I don't see clearly what he wants. But I told him: 'the way you are doing, it looks like you're going to be nothing in your life.' You know, he...needs a lot more time to make maturity, to be able to take seriously what he's doing or what he wants for the future.

Similarly, another father described his 21-year-old son as "young in character for his age" and "living day to day." In his words:

He seems to feel that he's young and he's got plenty of time to get a grip on life, if you know what I mean. So he feels that he's got time, you know, to slack and just, you know do what he's doing. And he doesn't seem to think that that's a big deal. But the way I look at it, you know, you've got to start some time so you might as well start while you're young here, you know. If you're going to slack now you're probably going to slack the rest of your life.

These and other fathers of diffuse sons are worried and frustrated with their sons' behavior.

Sources of Influence

Parents of sons in this diffuse stage of development felt they had little or no influence over their sons at this stage in their lives. Although a few said a teacher, an employer or an

older sibling had some influence on their sons' lives, a far larger number mentioned no close ties with adults who could guide them. Many worried that their sons were too easily influenced by peers who were as misguided or lost as their sons.

Parent/Child Relationships. From the parents' accounts, their approaches to parenting were either permissive or non-directive, or very directive or "nagging." Some report little or no communication with their sons. Others attempt to communicate, but do not feel they are being heard. The largest number, however, said their sons "hold their cards pretty close to the chest." A veteran father who would not speculate on his son's interest in the military said he and his son both tend to "hold a lot in." As he explained:

That's just not a conversation we had... He never said, 'yeah, I'm going to be a Marine,' or 'I'm going in the Air Force,' you know. I mean, that just never come out of his mouth... But then again, when I went in I never went around broadcasting, you know, I'm going to do this. He's just the kind of person he...will hold a lot inside him, you know. He won't reveal the way he really feels until, you know, it's like he has to. I didn't sit down and plan, you know, and ...I don't think he did either.

A mother, who described her son as always on the run, also mentioned that he is not much for talking. She thinks the military would help her son to open up:

He's out on the run. He's always in and out, in and out. I don't really have a lot of time to carry on big long conversations with him because he's really not much for talking. I would say...he is very closed in, which I know is not probably good... He needs to open up... I think the military could do that for him... Open him up, you know.

Another parent who was not aware of his son's interests in the military said that his son—like other kids—does not let anyone know what he is thinking until after he has made up his mind:

He don't sit down and just, you know, talk to me... But I ain't never heard him say nothing

about no going in the Army or nothing like that, you know. I have never heard him talking about nothing like that... A lot of times kids don't tell you nothing 'til the day he's ready to go.

Most of these parents were "okay" with this arrangement because it was consistent with their seemingly passive or "hands-off" approach to parenting. As one mother explained:

I don't have any problem with it. I like whatever he likes. I want him to be happy with whatever, you know, is good for him. It's up to him... I can't live his life... He might just go [into the military] and, you know, not let me know 'til the last minute... I have to agree with whatever he'd like, you know. Cause it's his life... I can't live his life.

More than one-half of the parents in the diffuse decision-making cluster—fathers as well as mothers—described tensions in their families that may have affected their sons' outlook on life and/or their own relationships with their sons. One father, for example, described a recent and messy divorce that left his son "confused about life." He has stressed the importance of education and training and the positive benefits of military service. However, he believes that "talk is cheap" and yields compliance, but only at a superficial level. He thinks there is "nothing more effective" than letting young people make their own decisions and experience the consequences. "We all have to learn from our own mistakes... It is the experiences that you have yourself that changes you."

Other parents attempt to be more directive with their sons. Some view this as necessary, given the circumstances of their relationships. A single father, for example, said he recently regained custody of his son after his estranged wife declared she could no longer control him. At the time, his son was into "gangster cars," and hung around with a "rotten bunch of apples" who shared his interests. Initial efforts to reason with his son and steer him in a positive direction did not work. "We couldn't coordinate his ideas with my ideas," he said. So after many heated

arguments about who he could and could not associate with, he felt compelled to take a "drastic approach" with him. One day he just stopped arguing with his son and threw away all the "gangster car" videos his son had brought home. "I told him everyone around those cars don't have a future." He also told him that if he does not like the rules he should go back to live with his mother and her boyfriend who "no want to live with him." The turning point in the relationship occurred after the mother announced that she "didn't want him over there." As he explained:

For that moment I say I didn't want nothing to do with him [either]. Then I try to have a different kind of relationship and I try to make a good relationship... Change a little bit because, you know, I was really drastic with him... I tried to be nice with him, okay, when he came I said, 'son, you know this is not the way we have to work... We have to do a different kind of relationship.' He'd comment he's going to give me good grades...and I say, 'you give me good grades...I can give you a car if you want.' ...And then, you know, it start to work better and finally he got happy, I got happy.

Like a number of other parents in the diffuse decision-making cluster, he has tried to motivate his son to do better than he has done. His advice is vague, however, and his expectations or suggestions sound unrealistic:

I want whatever he wants to do. I want for him that he be a professional. That's my big idea, you know. I want him to be any kind of professional, but a good profession like he could be a doctor, you know, or a businessman... I don't want him [to end up] like me, you know. I have to work everyday, you know, with my shoulders... I tell him the best way to work is using your brain you have... Get a profession, you know, something that gets better money.

He worries that his son is not taking the necessary steps to carve out a career niche for himself and assume adult responsibilities. "All the time I have to tell him do this...don't do that." "If I can't make a man out of him," he thinks, "maybe the

Army can do it.” Although few of the other parents in the diffuse decision-making cluster are so blunt, most feel that the military would help their sons “get a grip” on their lives.

Other influences on sons. Compared to most parents who described their sons as rational decision-makers, many of these parents expressed concerns that peers influenced their sons, often in negative or nonproductive ways. One father, for example, said his son was interested in the military before he “got in with these other kids.” Most said their sons’ friends were just like them—unfocused and just hanging out, going nowhere. In the words of one father:

I think he’s like most of his friends... They’re all going through basically the same thing he is. That’s the shame of it. Some of them work, some of them don’t. They have entirely too much free time on their hands and...they haven’t found their direction either. So, you know, most of his friends are basically in the same boat he is.

Several parents said their sons were influenced by bad elements in their neighborhoods. As one mother put it:

In the neighborhood where he grew up...the kids he hung out with were not very well directed. They were not going anywhere. Out of all his friends, he’s the only one that finished high school and part of why he finished high school is because I was so adamant that he should.

As a single mother, she attributes many of her son’s difficulties to the fact that he had too few adults in his life:

He’s made some bad decisions... He’s listened a lot to kids... He’s just kind of kicked around with this bunch of friends of his and I think that’s been a bad influence... His father left when he was 3-years-old and so basically I’ve raised he and his brother alone... So I think he didn’t have enough other people in his life to shape him because he didn’t always want to listen to me as he got

older. His friends meant much more to him than I did.

Similar concerns were expressed by parents in stable, intact marriages:

My husband and I try to encourage him... Tell him you are 21. You need to be thinking about life, the future you want, you know. And he knows this, but it just seems like he wants to be under us forever... He knows he have it made here... He don’t really just share responsibility, but he does enough just to get by and he got that ‘if I get out there, I won’t make it’ attitude... But he don’t wanna really listen to what we say... He listens, but it’s just like it’s going straight through and he’s gonna listen to what his friends say.

In time, she thinks he will come around and see what she and her husband are telling him is true:

I know his friends have a lot to do with the way that he’s going now, but his father and I are trying to turn him around and he’s listening some... But I guess it’s just going to be a while before it just really sink into him. What we are saying to him is true... We just keep talking.

One father thinks his son will eventually find a girlfriend that could keep him in line:

I feel that he will eventually latch on to a woman that will keep him in line... Make him go to work everyday, come home...that kind of thing... I think that if he had that partner that was structured, but not a mother figure, [he’d straighten right out]... You know, somebody that could help him talk through his decisions [and was concerned with the outcomes].

Another, however, said he and his wife worry that their son’s girlfriend has too much influence over his decisions. “His whole life,” he said, “revolves around her.” He thinks his son has been making some unwise career decisions just so he can hang out with her. For example, before this girlfriend

came around his son had plans to enlist in the Air Force:

He seemed interested in the military... He made an effort to talk to recruiters... He met like the Army recruiter and the Marine recruiter at school, then he made a point of going [into the city] because we don't have recruiters in town. He made a point of going up there and talking to the Air Force recruiter... When he started going with this girl [though], everything just kind of was put on hold.

This father is trying to "edge" his son back to the military, but knows that he "can't push him into something he's not sure he wants to do."

Recruiter Contact

Although their sons had expressed some interest in joining the military when they were interviewed for YATS, few of these parents could say with any certainty whether their sons had ever talked to a recruiter. Even among parents who were aware of contact, only one or two could describe the nature of their sons' contacts with recruiters in any detail. One parent did not know whether his son "really sat down and talked with the recruiter or not." His impression was that the recruiters came to the school and "just gave him handouts or materials." Another father said he was only aware that his son received materials from one or two of the Services in the mail, but was not aware of their content. "He get 'em in the mail all the time. He looks at 'em, but him and I don't discuss 'em. That's his mail and whatever he wanna do with it is fine."

A mother who supported her son's interests in the military said a lot of recruiters called her son right after he graduated from high school. Although she did not know what they talked about, her son felt pressured to say no just to get them off his back:

When he got out of high school...[recruiters] were calling right and left... I don't know what they talked about because he would take the phone into his bedroom... He said a few

times: 'God! They're not giving me a chance to breathe... They're just calling, calling, calling,' you know. He finally just said 'No!'

She was disappointed that the recruiters did not effectively engage her son. All they needed to do, she said, was sit down and calmly explain to her son the benefits and the duties of military life. Other parents who thought the military would be a positive destination for their sons echoed this mother's suggestion. In the words of one mother:

[My son] really needs someone to really sit down and talk to him. Sometimes they won't listen to their parents, you know. It's like you're bothering them, but coming from somebody else, you know, maybe that will help. If [recruiters] speak to him and let him know that the military is a good career... He can get a career out of it...and you can go to school there and you can learn. You can do anything there... If they talk to him and make him see, you know, the way you're living right now is wrong... He will decide... That's all he needs... He needs information to know what it is, what he's gonna do there, and what it's gonna do for him. He needs those types of information, which he doesn't have.

Another said much the same thing, adding that the recruiter must be honest with her son and tell him the "bad things" as well as the "good things" about the Service so that he can make a truly informed decision:

If he has the right push... I mean if the right person would talk to him and show him all the options, something that he can be happy doing and making the money he wants to, he will do it. I just mean, you know, that person has to be very...not convincing because I don't want him to trick him into something, but honest... And I need that person to tell him what is good there, what is bad there, all the things he is going to be able to do, all the troubles he will encounter... Be very honest and at the same time show him how good it could be.

Like these parents, many others in the diffuse decision-making cluster would support their sons' decisions to enter the military. Unfortunately,

they do not feel they can influence their sons to join. Positive recruiter contact would help, but so far it has not materialized.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Military for Sons

Nearly all parents in the diffuse decision-making cluster think the military would provide discipline and the sort of structured environment their sons need to develop maturity, responsibility, and career skills or goals. One mother, for example, initially resisted her son's interest in the military because she did not want him to leave home. However, as he grew older, she realized that he lacked discipline in his life. "He missed a lot of school because he overslept... So all kinds of things like that...the Army can fix." A father said he thought the discipline of the military would do his son a lot of good because he would "have to be at a certain place at a certain time, and other people depending on him, and have superiors to answer to." In other words, he said, the military would teach him "what life is all about."

Another parent was pushing the military for his son for similar reasons:

So my idea was...he go to the Army because I saw the way he was doing and I say, this guy need a lot of discipline. So I say, well, if I cannot have any control, the Army will be a good decision for the way he can have better maturity... When my older son told me [that this son] wants to be in the Army, but only weekends... I was disappointed. If he's going to the Army he's going to be full-time because I don't want him to hang around here [all the rest of the week] doing nothing.

A less controlling father thinks the military would help his son find work that he is interested in pursuing:

I think it would be a chance for him to kind of learn some sort of career, cause if he goes in there he's going to be assigned, you know, some kind of responsibility, some kind of job, that he's going to have to do. And he's going to have to do it right or, you know, they're not going to put up with him... And maybe he'd

do something there that maybe he'd get a liking to... It's just that he'd have a lot more options, he'd see a lot more things than he will staying in this little town here.

Several other parents who live in small towns or rural sections of the country, also worry that there are too few career or employment opportunities for their sons. A very poor father who supports his family on wages from McDonald's said: "There ain't no jobs out here for my sons. I would never try to stop them from getting in the military where you always have a job." Another father whose son bales hay and takes most any work he can get, emphasized the security of jobs in the military:

I would say above all, [the military] would provide security. Knowing...every month you get a paycheck, you have benefits, living quarters, food, some adventure, and a lot of discipline and structure. You know...all those things that we all need to make it through life.

Other persistent themes in their perspectives on the military for their sons are independence and direction or focus. One father, for example, said the military would force his son to become more self-reliant and "give purpose" to his life:

I think getting out of the area here and away from everybody so he has to do something himself... He can't run to mommy, he can't run to dad or uncle this, or cousin...you know, he's stuck, he's going to have to do it himself... He'd have no choice. And I think by realizing that, he would finally get his feet on the ground thinking, 'well, I've got to do something for myself here... I'm the one assigned to do this, I've got to do it.' I think that would do a lot of good... It would give him some purpose in life and I think he needs that.

This father may sound tough, but he admits that he and his wife contribute to their son's carefree lifestyle. As he explained:

We only have two sons and he's kind of spoiled. You know, probably my wife and I could be blamed for that, but...when you try

raising your kids, you try to give them things you never had... You try to make life comfortable for them. I think that's what being a parent is all about.

A veteran father whose son wants to go into law enforcement told him "the best thing you can do" is join the Marines:

I have always tried to push him in a positive direction and I had told him that I thought that [joining the Marines] would be the best thing for him to do because he was very well structured out of school... He would have been very used to getting up at a certain time, eating at a certain time, doing certain things at a certain time...and then would have been the best time to go do it and get it over with... I had him convinced he was young enough to go and spend two years, four years and still have a nice full life ahead of him... He wanted to be a cop and I said, 'you know, here's the way to go and do that... Go into the military police training and they will hire you on the street when you get out.'

He was disappointed when the Marines rejected his son—presumably because he had problems in school and "a couple of run-ins" with the police:

It's a shame... I would have liked to have seen him go because basically we're in a peacetime situation and I think it really would have given him the focus and the opportunity to really make something of himself and still be able to pursue his dreams of being in law enforcement. So it's a shame... I don't think I have the whole story, but he was quite embarrassed about the whole thing and he didn't want to talk about it... I'm sure all his stuff in his youth, you know, with his problems in school...[and] a couple of run-ins with the police...nothing drastic, kid stuff in my opinion.

Assuming that their sons entered voluntarily, few mentioned any potential drawbacks of military service. Several, however, worried that their sons might not adapt to the rigid structure of the military. As one father put it: "My son's a free spirit... I worry whether he could maintain that

kind of discipline and understand that an order is an order and you do what you're told." Another drawback mentioned by several mothers was concern that their sons could be killed. Several parents mentioned international terrorism, and the risk soldiers take when they guard embassies. As one mother put it, "the military could be the best thing for kids, if they don't get killed." She mentioned the chance to grow up in a structured environment, education benefits, and free room and board. Having grown up during the Vietnam era, however, she is reluctant to encourage her son's interest in joining:

I thought if he really wants to go to the Service, you know, I would be behind him. But I'm afraid to be the one to push it down his throat because if he ever got killed I'd think I shouldn't have put this out there. I have a very, very strong fear of someone getting killed when they go into the Service even though I know the likelihood isn't there... Maybe it's because we all were a part of the Vietnam thing... And now we're in trouble with Iran, or God knows who, Kosovo, I mean any place.

Her boyfriend, who had served in the military, tells her she's "just talking like a mother." He thinks the "best thing that could happen to these kids is they get their asses in the Service like we used to do and that will...turn them into men." Her boyfriend has talked to her son about the military, but thinks he may do more to discourage than encourage his interest:

He'll talk to [my son] about the military every once in a while... But, if anything, I think it may not be a positive thing for my son to hear because [my boyfriend] is very, very regimented. He's got a regimented personality now. He's compulsively clean, he's very conservative politically and, you know, if anything, I think my son thinks, 'oh gosh! I don't want to be like that.'

Cluster 5: Parents of Disconnected Youth

One in ten of the parents whose sons expressed positive propensity for military service described their sons as “disconnected.” According to their accounts, their sons are immature, neither attending school nor working, and have engaged in little or no exploration of their interests or abilities. Further, they show no signs that they are either anxious to change or susceptible to influences that might jostle them from this state of arrested development. All but one described themselves as working or lower class.

The majority said their sons were “slow learners,” and nearly one-half said their sons had either left school before graduation or were “over-age” high school students. One mother described her son as “not too bright when it comes to writing, reading...and spelling.”

There was not a lot these parents could say in terms of their sons’ approaches to careers and the future. One father, a retired boxer, said his son has not worked in over two years. About all he could say about him was that he’s a “very healthy young man that needs some type of activity.” A mother said her son spends most of his time on the streets with other boys who neither go to school nor work. She said she “expects better than this from him, but she’s not getting it.” Another mother said all her son wants to do is play:

I see him—he’s thinking like a kid. He just wants to play, play, play, play and have fun... And he mentioned that a couple of times also. He said, you know, ‘I want to enjoy my childhood as a child because once I get older I have to focus more on work and school.’

Although he does not even have a high school diploma, she said he chooses not to work because he does not want a minimum wage job. She has tried talking to him about his future plans, but does not feel like she is making any connection:

I try to talk to him...but I don’t know if I’m really connecting to him because he’s not out there looking for work. I remember a few

months back, he used my car just to go a few blocks to go get his hair cut... A car ran into my car and he borrowed my car without permission... So he knew that he was in the wrong and he says, ‘okay, if I have to go work and pay for the repairs, I’m going to have to do that.’ So his mind was made up that he had to do this. Then when he learned that he wasn’t at fault and the other party’s insurance paid for the damages, then work disappeared out of his mind again.

A few parents of disconnected youth suggested that their sons might be involved in criminal activities. For example, one said that her son always seems to have money in his pocket, though he’s never had a job. Another said that any time there is a crime in the neighborhood, the police “consult” her son. One mother said her 21-year-old son has been arrested and jailed several times, though she believes his friends were the culprits. At the time of the in-depth interview, her son was doing community service for violating the conditions of his probation and hanging out with the same bunch of guys. Periodically, she said, he promises to straighten up, but his efforts to-date have been shallow and short-lived:

He hasn’t been making any decision... None that I can think of...because if he make a decision today or tomorrow, he broke it. So he doesn’t really make any that lasts long enough to say that he made a decision... Sometimes he cries, he says he’s sorry, I’m gonna change...but that’s how far he’s gonna go. You can see the change for one week, two weeks and then he start over again... He make a decision like he’s not gonna go with his friends any more and he did stop for two weeks [and] he just sit in this house doing nothing... Then he said he’s bored and then he go back to his friends again... They call him and then everything start all over again.

Sources of Influence

Like the mother whose son “promises to change” but never does, other parents of disconnected youth feel they have little influence or control over the sons’ behavior. Some mentioned the negative influence of friends; others described their sons as

loners—spending most of their time playing Nintendo or just moping around the house. Several fathers described their sons as psychologically insulated from their influence:

He's not influenced by any one particular thing... He's not that type of person... He would tell you in a minute, no one thing influenced him. He will never tell you that 'I listen to so and so.' Nobody has what you would call a real hold on him.

Another father also described his son as inaccessible:

He doesn't talk to people. He doesn't say, 'dad, I'm thinking about this. What do you think of this?' He never talk to his parents like that... He does whatever he wants to do, you know. I feel left out, but you know, when...you're 21 you can do what you want.

At one point, this father "requested" his son to go in the Service, based in part on his own brother's positive experience:

I had a brother who experienced the Service and he went through the military and he came out and it did him good, you know. He got his career, [and it] helped his life. So I figured it would be a good thing for my son.

Rather than "make any preparations to make himself ready to go," however, he said his son moved out of the house. At the time of the in-depth interview, this father did not know where his son moved to or how he was supporting himself.

Compared to fathers, the mothers of these disconnected youth are more persistent in their efforts to influence their sons. However, none thought they were really reaching them. One mother described her interactions with her son in this way:

I think he better get his act together, personally... I try to sit down and talk to him, ask him what he wants out of life and what he wants to do. And we're at this point he says he doesn't know and it's like you're 19...

You gotta think about it... I says get a job, do it for a while. Think of what you wanna do and grow up, go do it and try it, you know.... I've [also] told him to go in the Service.. That's a great way to grow up... You gotta do something with your life and that's a great way to start... He just says, 'yeah, yeah, yeah' and walks away.

This mother would really like her son to go into the Service because it would "give him some purpose and help him find out what kind of career he really wants to do." However, she said he has shown "no inkling of wanting to go" and she is "not going to force him to do something he doesn't want to do." A major barrier to military service for him, she said, may be the difficult relationship he has with his father, who spent his entire career in the Army:

He has never liked it...because his father wants him to do that... His father was gone a lot...and [my son] is upset with his father about that.... And I think, you know, my son just dislikes it because of thinking he got robbed some of the time with his dad when he was sent overseas during the Gulf War and all the other times.

Another mother said her son appears motivated to join the Service only when he is depressed or she is on his case about something:

Several times, when he kind of like got into a...dead end and he's depressed... Or, you know, I'm on his case about missing classes and getting a diploma and having a curfew and coming home a certain time while his friends are still out there...he'll talk about [the military] as a way of getting away... That's when I see he has the materials around and then also at school he says there are recruiters, you know, that come around.

She thinks that if he ever graduates from high school and "things are not going well," he might join the military.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Military Service

The majority of fathers and some mothers of “disconnected sons” encouraged their sons to join the military. Discipline was the most common benefit of the military mentioned by these parents. One father’s depiction of the benefits for his son is typical:

All positive things he can get from the military... One reason...he need to go to the military is he needs a point of discipline. Two is, he got to learn to take orders, not just give ‘em. And three is to have some structure about when goes to bed [and gets up]—you know, certain hours you close your doors, you lock your doors and go to bed. You don’t stay up all night long listening to the radio.

Similarly, a mother said her son would benefit most from the structured environment of the military:

So instead of hanging out with his friends and playing handball in the park... I think I would rather see him at least go into the military and get some type of structure and think differently... He needs maybe three or four years... If he wants to hold on to it as a career, then that’s up to him. But I just feel like he needs some type of structure.

Another parent, whose husband was in the military when she married him, also said her son would benefit from the discipline, but is afraid to encourage him to join:

The military is good because it gives them discipline... That’s a good thing, but sometimes I heard that they abuse them... And it’s war... That’s the two things that make me think when you said military, I said, ‘oh boy, I’m afraid of it.’ It’s like I don’t encourage him for those two reasons.

One mother said she wants her son to join the military just to get him away from the negative influence of his friends. Another mother expressed similar concerns. At one time,

however, she actively discouraged her son’s interest in the Marines:

He said the Marines... And I was kind of trying to talk him out of the Marines... Number one, I always hear that they’re the first ones to go [into battle] and the last to come back... And number two, the hate thing that goes on and I understand that it does happen, although the military might want you to think it doesn’t happen, but it happens... I don’t think I told him any reason, though. I just said, ‘Oh! I’m afraid of the military. I don’t like it. Please don’t think about it,’ you know. I just cut him off.

She now regrets that she discouraged him. “But now,” she said, “I’d rather he goes [in the military] instead of dying on the street or going back to jail, you know.”

Summary

Parents of sons who expressed some interest in joining the military when they were interviewed for YATS, described diverse perspectives on youth propensity based largely on differences in their sons’ approaches to thinking about the future and planning careers.

More than one-half described their sons’ approaches to planning for their futures in mostly rational terms. Among these parents, three subgroups emerged based on differences in their sons’ considerations of the military. The first subgroup consisted of parents of sons whose primary interest was to join one of the Armed Forces. Compared to all others in this study, these parents and their sons had the greatest exposure to the military lifestyle and recruiters. Some grew up in military families; others lived in close proximity to military installations. Based on their own experiences or observations, most were confident that their sons could find fulfillment in the military. Like parents in the previous chapter, they talked through various options with their sons and did not attempt to steer them toward particular careers or career destinations. However, they tended to mistrust recruiters and attempted to assert some authority in their sons’ negotiations with them.

Among parents of rational decision-making sons, a second subgroup consisted of parents and sons who, for the most part, are attracted to the college benefits available to men and women who serve in the Armed Forces. The majority of these parents have little or no education beyond high school. They work hard, but remain poor. Their sons have specific career interests, but do not have sufficient resources to support them through college. Without a college education, they worry that their sons also will end up poor. Although none of these parents or their spouses ever served in the military and recruiter contact is low, they are aware of college tuition benefits attached to service. In their eyes, and the eyes of their sons, the military offers one of the few paths to better and more fulfilling careers and lives.

A third subgroup consisted of parents whose sons had considered the military, but ultimately decided to pursue other paths. Some had specific career interests that they could have pursued in either the military or civilian sectors. However, when they learned that they might not get job assignments in the military that were compatible with their interests, their attention turned to the civilian sector. Unlike those in the previous subgroup, their parents could afford to pay for whatever education or training they needed to pursue their career interests.

The remaining parents—approximately one-half of those whose sons expressed some interest in the military when they were interviewed for YATS—described their sons as either diffuse decision-makers or disconnected youth. Parents of sons whose career interests are diffuse, used words like “unfocused,” “dreamy,” and “flighty” when they talked about their sons’ orientations to the future. Although their sons are either in school or working, they worry about their lack of direction. Parents of disconnected youth—i.e., those who are neither enrolled in school nor working—described their sons as very immature, rebellious and, in some cases, antisocial. Both groups of parents are mostly working or lower class and, compared to other groups of parents in this study, a disproportionate number described dysfunctional family living environments and/or difficult relationships with their sons. Many feel the military would provide their sons with the discipline and direction their sons so desperately need. Unfortunately, their sons do not seem inclined to join.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR RECRUITMENT

Over the past several years, the Armed Forces have been struggling to recruit sufficient numbers of young men into their ranks. For this reason, they are looking for ways to expand or enhance their recruitment strategies. Engaging parents in the recruitment process is one possibility. This in-depth study was undertaken to explore parent perspectives on the military and further understanding of youth propensity. The following implications for recruitment are based on key study findings:

- **The Services might ease long-term recruitment problems through ad campaigns that target pre-adolescent youth.**

Nearly three-quarters of parents in the entire sample—about one-half of those with positive propensity sons and nearly all with negative propensity sons—described their sons' approaches to careers and the future in rational terms. According to these parents, their sons have taken the time to explore their interests; assess their strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes; and gather information. Many remarked that their sons' career choices were consistent with special interests or talents that emerged at a young age. Among positive propensity sons, these included interests commonly associated with the military—e.g., aviation, target shooting and disaster relief. Among negative propensity sons, longstanding interests included acting, animation, computer programming, farming and forestry. When it came time for these sons to think about what they would like to do after high school, most sought ways to transform these longstanding interests into professions or careers.

- **Current ad campaigns that link military service with skills training and college tuition benefits appeal to lower middle and working class parents, but do not coincide with the needs or values of parents in the solid middle and upper middle classes.**

According to many parents—especially those from the middle and upper classes, the military was never consciously rejected because it never arose or occurred to them as an option. These parents can afford to finance their sons' education and training and, therefore, pay little attention to military ads that emphasize these benefits. More effective messages for these parents might portray, for example, positive connections between military service, college completion, and satisfying career outcomes; and/or link the military with non-tangible benefits for their sons—e.g., character development or pride in serving their country.

- **Recruitment efforts that rely on parents to direct or steer their sons toward the military are not likely to be successful.**

Parents who attempt to direct their sons' decision-making processes report few satisfactory results. The more effective parents understand and respect the need for their sons to pursue careers or career paths that interest them. These parents may make broad suggestions, but generally take the lead from their sons. If their sons mention the military, parents will encourage them to seek information about it and, perhaps, help them assess the fit between their aspirations and what the military offers. If their sons do not mention the military, a few parents might mention it as an option, but almost none will persist if their sons do not express an interest.

- **Efforts to provide parents with information about opportunities and benefits associated with military service may provide them with the substance and impetus for talking about the military with their sons.**

Many parents are aware that their sons receive materials from the various Services, particularly during their senior year in high school. However, since the materials are addressed to their sons they are reluctant to inquire about its substance since it is their

sons' private mail. It may be worthwhile to test the feasibility and effects of sending information about opportunities and benefits associated with military service to parents. Information might be used, for example, to counter popular stereotypes about the sorts of people who can contribute to, and benefit from, service to their countries. It could also explain ways that military service enhances young people's futures and, thereby, chip away at popular myths that military service disadvantages youth by delaying education and preparation for careers.

- **High pressure recruitment tactics may be counterproductive.**

Parents are put-off by recruiters who take advantage of youth's enthusiasm and willingness to trust adults. Parents—including career officers and their spouses—were very dissatisfied with verbal and written information provided by recruiters because it either was misleading or did not adequately address their questions.

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APPENDIX A

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Study Methodology

In 1995, the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) initiated a series of in-depth studies of respondents to the Youth Attitude Tracking Study (YATS). These studies were designed to address the need for a greater depth of understanding of issues surrounding military enlistment. DMDC believed that a conversation, rather than a fixed sequence of questions and short answers similar to the structure of the YATS survey, would yield that deeper understanding.

The fourth study in this series, the 1999 YATS In-Depth Study of Parents, was designed to gain a greater understanding of parents' roles in their sons' military enlistment. The previous in-depth studies as well as other quantitative studies, see for example Army Communications Measurement Systems (ACOMS) (Nieva, Wilson, Norris, Greenlees, Laurence and McCloy, 1995) and YATS (Lehnus, 1995), have consistently demonstrated the influence parents exert on youth career decision-making. The nature and process of that influence was the subject of this set of interviews.

The study was planned to target the parents of 1998 male YATS survey respondents. Parents of young men aged 17-21 with different enlistment propensities (i.e., level of interest in joining the military) were selected for the study. Both mothers and fathers were included as respondents.

Previous YATS in-depth studies demonstrated that interviews could be conducted over the telephone. In-person interviews with YATS parents would have been prohibitively expensive, given their geographic dispersion. In the previous studies in this series, we have been able to establish rapport with and maintain the interest of respondents during a lengthy interview. Respondents have completed the entire interview protocol willingly, averaging about 45 minutes. This methodology was used again for the 1999 YATS In-Depth Interviews with Parents.

The following sections describe the study methodology:

- Sample selection;
- Development of the interview guide;
- Interviewer training;
- Contact procedures;
- Data collection; and
- Data analysis.

Sample Selection

The aim of sampling in this study was to select a diverse group of parents of 1998 male YATS respondents. Sample selection involved two stages: first, selection of 1998 YATS respondents, followed by selection of one parent of each of these youth. These selected parents were the respondents for the study.

A target quota was set at 96 completed interviews (see Table 1). The total number of interviews was subdivided by quotas for youth race/ethnicity group and parent veteran status. In addition, we hoped to complete equal numbers of interviews with mothers and fathers.

Table 1. Target Quota of Respondents

Youth Race/Ethnic Group	Veteran Household		Non-Veteran Household		Total
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	
White	8	8	8	8	32
Black	8	8	8	8	32
Hispanic	8	8	8	8	32
Total	24	24	24	24	96

Sample Members

The 1998 Fall YATS administration provided a database of 6,572 males from which the sample of youth was selected. For each youth selected, one parent was assigned as the target respondent. Assignment was made so that the final sample would include approximately equal numbers of mothers and fathers. Because not every family contained both a mother and a father, procedures were designed for replacement of the selected parent with a same-sex parental figure, or the opposite-sex parent.

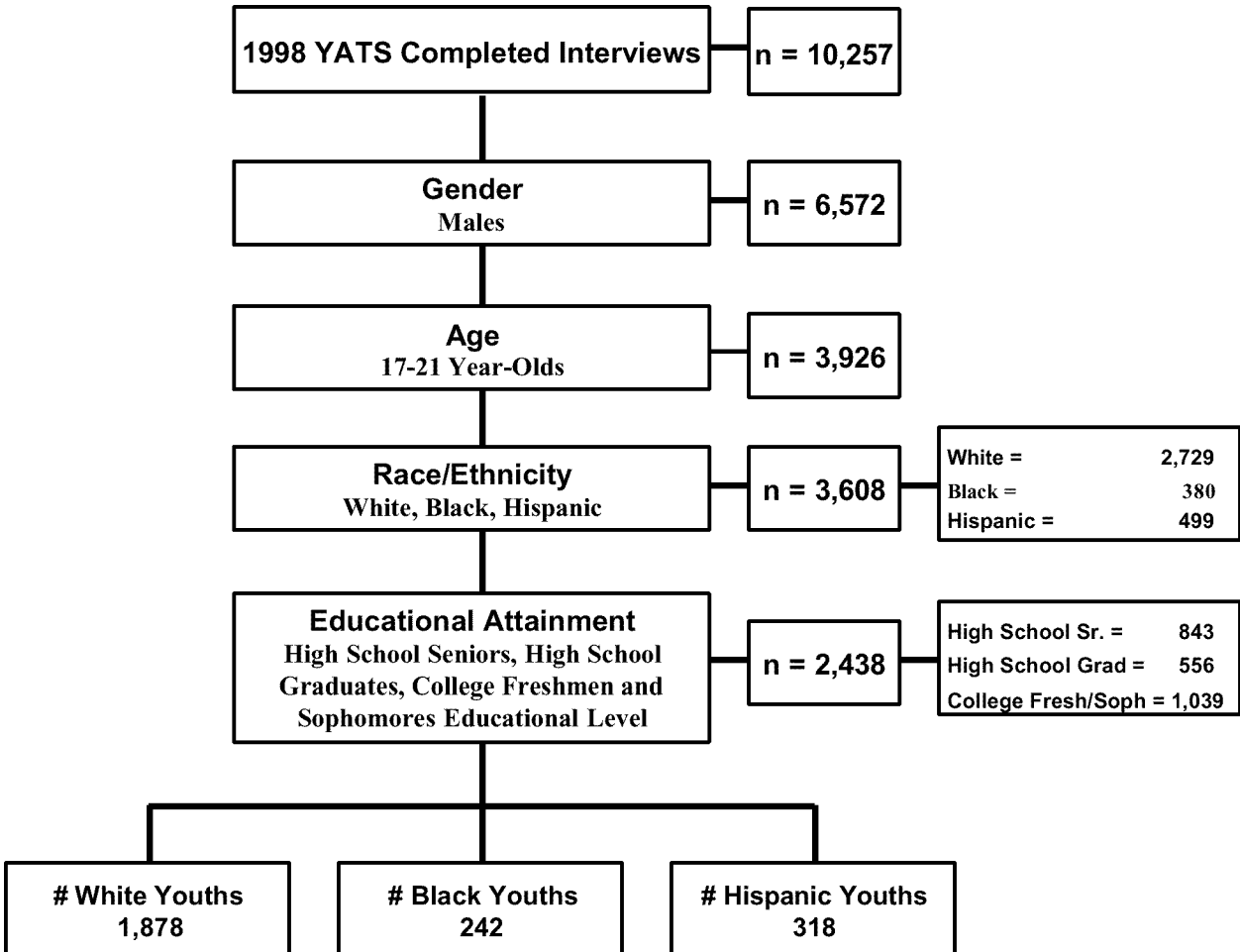
Selection of youth sample. Exhibit A provides a flow chart tracing the partitioning of the 1998 YATS respondent database to the final characteristics of the youth sample. Sample eligibility was determined by several socio-demographic variables:

- **Gender:** Limited to male YATS respondents;
- **Age:** Limited to 17- to 21-year-olds;
- **Race/Ethnicity:** Limited to youth who self-identified as White, Black or Hispanic; and
- **Educational Attainment:** Limited to high school seniors, high school graduates, and college freshmen and sophomores.

Only YATS respondents with these characteristics were retained for the study. Of the 10,257 1998 YATS respondents, 2,438 met these criteria.

Exhibit A

1999 YATS In-Depth Parent Interviews Sample Eligibility



Following the partitioning of the data, the sample pool was stratified on additional variables. The sample was stratified into 48 sample selection cells (3 race/ethnicity groups x 2 youth military propensity groups¹ x 2 parent veteran status groups x 2 youth math education level groups x 2 parent education level groups). The definitions of these variables follow:

- **Race/Ethnicity:** YATS respondents were identified as White, Black or Hispanic.
- **Youth Military Propensity:** The youth sample members were classified into two propensity groups. Past research on military propensity based on YATS surveys (Stone, Turner, & Wiggins, 1993; Orvis, Gahart, & Ludwig, 1992) shows that likelihood of enlistment is indicated by responses to “unaided” and “aided” propensity questions. Responses to YATS survey items were used to define two subsets of youth sample members:
 - **Joiners** - are those most likely to join the military. They provided an “unaided” mention of military service among their future plans, and said they would “definitely” or “probably” be on active duty in at least one of the Services in the next few years; and
 - Positive propensity youth** - gave positive responses to some questions about joining the military. While they did not provide an “unaided” mention of military service among their future plans, they did say they would “definitely” or “probably” be on active duty in at least one of the Services in the next few years.
 - **Negative propensity youth** - This group includes respondents who gave negative responses to questions about joining the military, as well as those who gave mixed (both positive and negative) responses.
- **Parent Veteran Status:** The youth sample members were classified as in a veteran household if either the mother or father was identified as a veteran. The youth was otherwise identified as in a non-veteran household.
- **Youth Math Education Level:** Each sampled youth was assigned a math level, based on which math classes he had completed. The levels were:
 - Low: Algebra 1 or less
 - High: At least Algebra 1 and geometry
- **Parent Education Level.** The highest level of education completed by either the youth’s mother or father. The levels were:
 - Low: High school diploma or less
 - High: One or more years of college

Selection of parents. The parent sample was derived from the youth sample. As is described in the next section, the first sampled case in each cell was assigned as a “Mother” parent interview and the second as a “Father” parent interview. If the selected parent was not available, a protocol for replacement with the opposite-sex parent or with a same-sex parent surrogate was followed. This is described in the Contact Procedures.

¹ The selection of cases from cells representing positive military propensity followed a specified order. Joiner cases were selected first, followed by Positive Propensity cases when Joiner cases within a cell were depleted.

Sampling Procedures

Initial sample selection. Prior to sample selection, cases were arranged in a random order within sample selection cells. The first 15 cases (or all cases, if 15 or fewer cases were in a cell) were selected from each cell. Within each cell, two cases were selected for Wave 1. The two cases were varied by age, then school status. The first sampled case in each cell was assigned as a “Mother” parent interview, the second as a “Father” parent interview. To prepare for sample management, other variables were also appended to the selected cases—the youth’s age, school status, employment status, math level, mother’s educational level, father’s educational level and youth’s state of residence. The additional variables were used to vary the selection of cases following Wave 1.

Replacement sample selection. All Wave 1 cases were worked until completed or finalized. Within cells, replacement sampling was done as needed for cases that were closed without an interview being completed. Each replacement case was similar to the Wave 1 closed case. When a case with similar characteristics to the closed case did not exist, another selection was made. The new case was selected to vary in characteristics from the other Wave 1 case in that cell. The newly selected case was assigned the same gender parent for interviewing as the case it replaced.

Sample management. Tabulations of variables in the completed cases were reviewed periodically throughout data collection to check for heterogeneity among the variables. If certain values (e.g., high school seniors) began to predominate among the completed cases, replacement cases were selected to balance out the representation (e.g., selection of more high school graduates and college students than high school seniors).

Development of Interview Guide

Development of Research Questions

Our initial design efforts in this study focused on identification of research questions that, in turn, would guide the development of the interview guide and the design of the sample. Although our primary interest was in parent perspectives on youth propensity to enter (or not to enter) military service, we reasoned that this decision was best understood in the context of youth career decisionmaking in general. In this light, two major sets of research questions emerged:

- 1. How do parents influence their sons’ career planning and decisionmaking?** Detailed research questions in this topic area included:

Parental Roles

- What actions do parents take in helping their sons choose careers? (Do they answer questions, recommend exploratory activities, gather information, open doors for opportunities, fund education or college visits).
- How do parents perceive their roles (e.g., should they direct their sons toward certain paths; should they screen against other paths; should they define a zone of acceptability and then “allow choice” within those parameters; should they be “laissez faire” about career choice)?
- Do parents perceive their children as receptive to their advice? Is this a function of the characteristics of the parent-child relationship? (Has the child evolved to fit the parent’s ideal? Is the parent pleased with the result?)

- Generally, what is the attitude of the parent to the child? Do parents have confidence in their children? Are they supportive/distant? How does the son interact with his mother, compared to his father? Can we distinguish between single- and dual-parent households?

Parental Aspirations for Their Sons

- What are parents' aspirations/expectations for their sons' futures?
- To what degree are the parent's aspirations/expectations driven by the characteristics of the child?
- Do parents think their son's goals are achievable?

Other Sources of Influence

- What do parents perceive as sources of influence on their sons' career decisionmaking (other people, groups, institutions, and events)? How do parents see their and others' roles in directing/supporting their sons' career exploration and choice?

2. What images and opinions do parents have of the military? Detailed research questions in this topic area included:

General Opinions and Images

- What are parents' opinions and views of the Armed Services? How strongly are they held?

Images of Military Life and a Military Career

- How do parents perceive the military as an environment for their sons?
- Do parents believe that the military has changed in the past decade? How? What is the basis for that perception? In particular, do Blacks feel the military is less attractive an option compared to ten years ago?
- What are parents' perceptions of military personnel? Of the kinds of people who join the military?
- How do parents evaluate the costs and benefits of military service, compared to other options? Is military service a fallback option? A stepping stone?
- Do parents view the military as a vehicle for social mobility?
- Do parents perceive their sons as potential officers or as enlisted personnel?
- Do parents perceive their sons as interested in serving for one term or making a career in the military?
- What are parents' attitudes toward a military career for their sons?

Sources of Parental Images and Information

- What are parents' sources of information/impressions of the military?
- How are parents' perceptions affected by recent news events?
- How are parents' perceptions influenced by personal ideology?

Communicating about the Military

- What images and information do parents communicate to their sons?
- How do they communicate with their sons about the military?

For each research question, we also planned to examine whether there were any systematic differences in parent perspectives based on characteristics such as gender, race or ethnicity, class, and veteran status.

To answer these research questions, we developed a 45-minute telephone interview guide (see Appendix B for a copy of the interview guide and Appendix C for the detailed question-by-question annotation).

Organization of the Interview Guide

The interview guide included an introductory section, four main sections that paralleled the research questions, and a concluding section:

- **Section A - Son's Current Activities and Involvements.** The introductory section asked parents general questions about their sons' current involvement in school, work and other activities.
- **Section B - Son's Approach to the Future.** This section explored sons' current career plans and parents' aspirations/expectations for their sons' futures.

The parent was asked to describe the son's ideas or plans for his future. Because some young men may not have made any plans or decisions, interview questions about the decisionmaking process were couched more broadly as "thinking" or "exploring." Career plans were referred to as "plans" or "ideas" about the future. Plans or ideas were explored from the parent's perspective of how the young man was going about making decisions, what his ideas or plans were and how he was preparing to pursue them. The parent was asked for his or her appraisal of the son's ideas or plans and also about his or her perceptions of the son's resources and limitations. The parent's hopes and concerns about the son's future were also explored.

- **Section C - Influences on Son.** This section included questions about the parents' assessment of influences on their sons' career decision-making, including their own influence.

The parent was asked to describe specific people, events or experiences that may have had an influence on the son and the ways in which they had exerted an influence. The parent was asked about his or her assessment of these influences.

The parent was questioned about his or her own influence on the son and about the son's responses. The parent was also asked about what role he or she would like to play in the son's planning.

- **Section D - Images of the Military.** This section examined parents' general opinions and images of the military.

The parent's ideas about the role of the military and the people who are in the military were explored.

Sources of these images or impressions were also discussed. The parent was asked about family involvement in the military, such as the parent's own military service. If there were

close family or friends who had served in the military, the parent was asked about their opinions about the military and how they may have influenced the son.

- **Section E - The Military as Possible Destination for Son.** This section focused on parents' ideas about the military as a possible choice for their sons.

The son's interest in the military in general and in any particular Service was explored.

The parent was asked about military recruiter contact and the nature and extent of such contact, if it had occurred.

The parent's perceptions about the costs and benefits of military service were elicited.

In a final set of questions about the career decisionmaking process, the parent was asked about whether there were steps the son should be taking toward his career goals, and whether the son had any special talents or needs that might affect his future plans.

- **Section F - Contextual Information.** This section concluded the interview with questions about the parent's demographic characteristics and household composition. A wrap-up question asked the parent whether he or she had any final thoughts to add on the interview topics.

Topics were organized to follow a natural flow of conversation by introducing more general areas first, such as current career plans, followed by more specific topics like military propensity. However, if the respondent introduced topics in a different order, the interviewer followed the respondent's lead. Within sections, the same questions were posed to each respondent. Probes were used liberally to encourage the respondent to expand on responses or to focus the discussion on specific items of interest.

The interview guide was reviewed with the Project Officer and then pretested with several parents to ensure that (a) we were covering the intended content, (b) the language was clear and understandable, and (c) the interview had a natural flow.

Interviewer Training

Eight senior and middle-level researchers conducted the interviews. All had experience using qualitative, open-ended instruments, and six of the interviewers conducted interviews during previous YATS in-depth studies. Interviewers included two African-American and six white interviewers. One interviewer was Spanish-speaking.

Prior to data collection, each interviewer participated in a 4-hour training session that included:

- An overview of the project and its rationale;
- A review of qualitative data collection techniques and how they differ from standard survey interviewing;
- An overview of the structure and rationale of the protocol as well as a question-by-question review;
- Guidance on smooth handling of flow and question order; and
- A set of frequently asked questions and their answers the youth respondents or their parents might ask about the project (see Appendix D).

Each interviewer then conducted a practice interview with a surrogate respondent, which was audio-taped. The project director reviewed the tapes and provided feedback on technique, including interview flow, probing, and specific intent of questions. For each interviewer, the project director reviewed the first several interviews and provided additional coaching on qualitative methods, as needed. She also continued to monitor transcripts for quality and consistency throughout the course of the interview process.

Contact Procedures

Youth sample members were initially contacted by a scheduling interviewer from Westat's Telephone Research Center (TRC). The TRC interviewer followed a protocol (included as Appendix E) to reach youth sample members and to select the parents for the in-depth interviews. The scripted introduction described the following:

- Purpose of the study;
- Estimated length of the interview (45 minutes); and
- Provision of a \$20 incentive to the parent for completion of the interview and a \$5 incentive to the son.

In the event the selected parent was unable to complete the interview due to illness, impairment, or absence, the opposite-sex parent was selected. In the event that the selected parent did not exist or did not have a relationship with the youth, the youth was then asked to identify a same-sex parent figure, followed by the opposite-sex parent, if the former individual was not available. If the selected parent lived away from the youth's home, but had a relationship with the youth, he or she was retained as the sampled parent.

After the sampled parent was identified, the TRC interviewer attempted to reach him or her and make an appointment for the in-depth interview. This contact also followed a script describing the purpose and estimated length of the interview, and the completion incentive (see Appendix E). The TRC interviewer also called the sample member the day before the appointment time to remind him or her of the appointment day and time. In scheduling, a minimum of 2 hours was left free between interviews to provide time for the interviewer to prepare a written summary.

To avoid initial refusals, the TRC interviewer explained the importance of the interview. If the selected sample member was busy or could not make an immediate interview appointment, the TRC interviewer offered to call back at another time. If the sample member declined to participate, the TRC interviewer reexplained the purpose of the interview and the importance of the sample member's participation. If the sample member gave a firm refusal to participate, the interviewer thanked the sample member and did not recontact him or her.

A Call Record (see Appendix F) was maintained for each sampled youth and sampled parent. The Call Record listed all call attempts and dispositions until the interview was completed or the case was finalized.

Prior to any telephone contact, specific guidelines were established to define the level of effort to expend in contacting sample members:

- **Call attempts.** A maximum of seven attempts were made to reach anyone at a given telephone number. The seven attempts were placed over different “time slices”: two daytime, three evening, and two weekend (one Saturday and one Sunday). Unsuccessful call attempts were coded as either “ring, no answer;” answering machine; or busy signal. (A message about the study was left on answering machines, but a return call was not requested.)
- **Household contacts.** After it was determined that the telephone number is a working number and someone in the household verified that the sampled youth was at that location, the maximum number of attempts to reach the youth was set at five.
- **Broken appointments.** The maximum number of appointments made and broken by the sampled parent was set at three.

If the maximum number of calls was reached in any category, the case was finalized. The calling rules were reexamined periodically to see if they were adversely affecting nonresponse. Toward the end of data collection, the number of call attempts for some sampled cases was increased. These were cases for which there were few replacement cases and where there seemed to be a chance of reaching a youth or parent (e.g., the parent worked irregular hours).

Data Collection

The data collection period was from May 31, 1999, to August 28, 1999. The in-depth interviewer had available a Respondent Profile Form (see Appendix G) for each assigned sample member. The Respondent Profile Form summarized the sampled youth’s responses to key 1998 YATS survey questions to be used either as background information to the in-depth interviewer or for direct reference during the interview. Among these were:

- *Personal characteristics, including age, race/ethnicity, state of residence, educational attainment, and employment status;*
- *More detailed educational information: type of high school program, grades usually received in high school, and plans for post-secondary schooling;*
- *Responses to questions about career plans, including plans for education or work in the next few years;*
- *Responses to questions about military propensity;*
- *Responses to questions about influences related to military propensity, including military recruiters, parents, siblings, and friends; and*
- *Parents’ information: father’s and mother’s education attainments and parents’ military service.*

Interviewers completed a summary form (see Appendix H) immediately after each interview. All but one parent respondent agreed to have their interviews recorded. Each recorded interview was transcribed verbatim.

Data Collection Results

The final disposition of the sample cases is described below. The description of the youth sample accounts for the status of all sample members. The description of the parent sample accounts for all selected parents, including those that were not eligible, refused, or were replaced by the opposite-sex parent.

Youth sample. Contacts were attempted or made with 288 youth to yield identification of 182 parents (see Table 2 below). Several youth were ineligible (n=6) or non-locatable (n=48), resulting in an eligible pool of 234 cases. Within the eligible pool, 182 cases were completed, yielding a 78% response rate.

Table 2. Youth Sample

	Number
Complete	182
Ineligible* (e.g., female youth, youth who had enlisted)	6
Non-locatable/non-working*	48
Female parent household	7
Refused	25
Maximum calls made	7
Not completed in field period	13
Total	288

* Indicates “ineligible” in calculation of response rate.

Parent sample. Contacts were attempted or made with 182 parents to yield 96 completed parent interviews (see Table 3 below). Several parents were ineligible (n=4) or non-locatable (n=2), did not speak English or Spanish (n=1), or were deceased (n=1), resulting in an eligible pool of 174 parents. Within the eligible pool, 96 interviews were completed, yielding a 55% response rate.

Table 3. Parent Sample

	Number
Complete	96
Ineligible* (e.g., too sick to complete interview, out of the country, 2 YATS brothers in a family)	4
Non-locatable*	2
Deceased*	1
Language barrier*	1
Female household	4
Refused	30
Maximum calls made	8
Not completed in field period	36
Total	182

* Indicates “ineligible” in calculation of response rate.

Completed cases. The characteristics of the 96 completed cases are presented below in an analysis that shows their characteristics related to the sampling variables (see Table 4 below).

Table 4. Youth and Parent Variables

Youth Variables	Number
Propensity	
Joiners	23
Positive	24
Negative	49
Race	
White	34
Black	30
Hispanic	32
Age	
17	21
18	25
19	21
20	18
21	11
School Status	
HS Senior	32
HS Grad	28
College Student	20
Nonstudent, Some College	8
Other Postsecondary	8
Youth Math Level	
High	47
Low	49
Total Respondents	96

Parent Variables	Number
Veteran Family	
Veteran	53
Nonveteran	43
Parent Maximum Education	
High	47
Low	49
Parent Sex	
Mother/Mother-Figure	50
Father/Father-Figure	46
Total Respondents	96

Data Analysis

This study used two sources of information in analysis: semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents and sons' responses to selected items on the YATS survey. Of these sources, systematic analysis of the in-depth interviews with parents posed the greatest challenge and investment of time. The volume of the transcriptions the interviews generated—more than 2,400 pages of text—required a system for organizing and sorting the data for individual cases, identifying relationships and patterns in the data across cases and writing the final report. Toward these ends, we followed a plan for processing and analyzing these data. A summary of the key steps in our data management and analysis approach follows.

Review and Preliminary Coding of Data

Once an in-depth interview was completed and transcribed, members of the analysis team conducted a careful review of the transcript. This review served as a check on the quality of data collected from each parent or parent-figure in the sample, including indications of interviewer bias and adequate exploration of key issues. Impressions and problems were communicated to the interviewer and, when necessary, the project director also provided additional training or guidance to the interviewer.

Also during this initial review, members of the analysis team began coding data for each case from the interview transcript and respondent profile form. The preliminary coding scheme was derived from the major categories and concepts implied in the study questions—e.g., gender and veteran status of the respondents, son's propensity, perspective on son's plans, general attitudes toward the military, and perceived benefits/drawbacks of military service for the son. In addition, each analyst recorded his or her ideas and impressions in the form of analytic notes. These notes commented on any patterns observed in the data (within and across respondents), as well as thoughts on emerging themes, relationships or policy implications.

Development of More Refined Constructs and Coding Categories

Throughout the data collection phase of the study, the analysis team met regularly to review coded interviews and shared thoughts contained in analytic notes. Important outcomes of the analysts' preparatory work and involvement in these discussions were shared understandings of key concepts across analysts and more refined constructs and coding categories over time.

Synthesis of Data

Next, members of the analysis team synthesized data associated with the key issues addressed in the study to identify patterns or relationships in the data, as well as exceptional cases. In addition, they garnered evidence that supported or challenged hypotheses. To do this, analysts pulled all relevant text from their coding sheets. For example, they pulled perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of military service for sons held by veteran and non-veteran parents. These data were then reviewed and finer-grained analyses of their content undertaken. The results of these analyses were summarized in matrices in ways that highlighted similarities and differences in the perceptions of the two groups. Subsequent queries and analyses, then, explored additional aspects of the data to determine whether and how perceptions differed along other dimensions, such as parents' gender or parenting style. When patterns in the data emerged, analysts returned to the transcript to gain a fuller contextual understanding of the findings.

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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1999 YATS IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Hello. My name is (YOUR FIRST NAME) and I'm calling from Westat on behalf of the Department of Defense. You were expecting my call?

Several months ago, your son [INSERT SON'S FIRST NAME] participated in a telephone survey that asked him questions about his plans for the future and his attitudes toward military service. Now, we're talking with parents around the country to get their perspectives.

Think of this interview as a conversation. The questions I have address the general issues or topics we're interested in, but they're intentionally open-ended since we want you to feel free to respond in whatever way best describes your thoughts or experiences. Please take whatever time you need to respond.

Also before we begin, it's important to mention that there are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. We're only interested in your thoughts and opinions. All your responses will be kept strictly confidential. We will never give your name or phone number to anyone, and your name will not be attached to the record of our discussion.

The interview will take 35-45 minutes to complete. Do you have that much time now? With your permission I'd like to tape record the interview so I don't have to take detailed notes while we're talking. At the end of the interview I'll turn the recorder off before I ask your full name and address so we can send you a check for \$20. Shall we begin?

[YOU MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE THE FULL NAME OF THE PARENT WHEN YOU CALL. EITHER WAY, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE INTERVIEW IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO ASK THE PARENT SOMETHING LIKE: "SHALL I CALL YOU MRS. FOSTER?" OR "IS IT OKAY IF I CALL YOU CHARLIE?" THIS WILL SHOW RESPECT AND WILL HELP YOU ESTABLISH RAPPORT.]

A. Son's Current Activities and Involvements

1. The information we have about [SON'S NAME] from the survey is pretty basic. At that time I think he was [fill in with information about grade/year in school, employment status, and other relevant information from the YATS survey]. Could you tell me more about him?

IF NOT MENTIONED, OR PARENT ASKS WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT HIM:

[Like:]

The sort of classes he's taking in school?

His work-related experience—e.g., jobs, internships, volunteer work?

How he spends his free time; any special interests?

The sort of kids he hangs out with? Is he a sociable kind of guy or does he tend to keep to himself? ... Things like that.

B. Son's Approach to the Future

2. What sort of ideas or plans does [SON'S NAME] have about the future? Where do you think he's headed?
3. What [has he done/is he doing] to prepare for [INCORPORATE KEY ASPECTS OF PARENT'S RESPONSE TO Q.4]?

IF NOT MENTIONED, OR PARENT ASKS WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT HIM:

How about in terms of: The sort of work he'd like to do? The sort of education or training he needs? The sort of person he'd like to become?

4. What do you think about the direction [SON'S NAME] is headed?

FOLLOW UP:

Is this the direction you thought he would take? Why is that?

5. Now, when you think about [SON'S NAME]'s future, what are the first things that come to mind?

FOLLOW UP:

What would you like to see [SON'S NAME] doing in the next three years or so?

IF NOT MENTIONED:

What would you say are your greatest hopes for [SON'S NAME]'s future?

What would you say are your greatest worries or concerns about [SON'S NAME]'s future?

What do you think [SON'S NAME] has going for him as he tries to reach his goals?

What obstacles does [SON'S NAME] have to overcome? What might keep him from achieving [plans/goals mentioned]?

6. Could you think about a recent decision that your son made that was important to him? How did he go about making that decision?

FOLLOW UP:

Please take whatever time you need to think about this before you respond. It's an important question for us.

C. Influences on Son

Let's talk about things that you think influenced [SON'S NAME]'s thinking about the future. These influences could be people—old, young; related, unrelated; real, fictional, events or experiences, or anything else you consider an influence on him.

7. First, what would you say are the major influences in your son's life?

FOLLOW UP:

In what ways does [whatever/whoever mentioned] influence [SON'S NAME]'s plans for his future?

IF NOT MENTIONED:

How are you involved in his thinking about the future? [ALTERNATIVE: How have you influenced him?]

What advice have you given him?

How does he respond to [approach/role mentioned]?

What role would you like to play [in your son's preparation for the future]?

8. Are there other influences we haven't talked about? Any other people? Anything that's happened to [SON'S NAME] or that [SON'S NAME] did? Any books? TV shows? Movies?

IF YES, FOLLOW UP FOR EACH SOURCE OF INFLUENCE:

Can you tell me something about that?

How do you feel about that?

D. Images of the Military

Now I'd like to get your thoughts and opinions about the military.

9. What's the first thing that comes to mind when I mention the military?

FOLLOW UP:

What else comes to mind?

IF NOT MENTIONED:

What do you think about the role the U.S. military plays in the world today?

What do you think about people in the military? The military life style?

10. Where do your ideas about the military come from?

FOLLOW UP:

Anywhere else?

IF NOT MENTIONED:

Have you ever served in the military?

Has anyone else in the household ever served in the military?

Has anyone close to you or your son ever served in the military? Anyone else?

For each person mentioned: What can you tell me about his/her experiences in the military?
How has he/she influenced [SON'S NAME]'s interest in military service?

E. The Military as Possible Destination for Son

Now, let's get back to your son.

11. To the best of your knowledge, has your son ever expressed an interest in any aspect of the military?

IF YES:

Can you tell me about his interest [in the military]?

How would you describe his interest in the military at the present time?

Is there anything else you can say about his current interest (lack of interest)?

[IF PARENT MENTIONS THAT INTEREST HAS DECLINED]: What do you think influenced this (continued/shift in) interest?

What has he done, if anything, to pursue this interest?

Is there anything else you can tell me?

IF NO:

Why do you think that's so?

What do you think about this?

In what ways might military service fit with your son's future goals or needs? Why do you think [it would fit/not fit]?

Is there anything else you can tell me?

12. Has [SON'S NAME] ever had any contact with a recruiter? Jr. ROTC? Other military influence?

Can you tell me about that?

How did it come about? (Who initiated the contact/discussion? Where did it occur?)

What role did you play? (How did you learn about this?)

What did your son think about it? What are your impressions?

What did you think about [this/these] contact? What did you tell your son about his contact(s)? (Verbally? Non-verbally?)

Does [SON'S NAME] know how you feel?

Has he ever talked to you or anyone else about this? What about other relatives? His friends? (Get same information as above.)

13. In your opinion, what are the pluses and minuses of military service for your son? What aspects of the military would be most stressful—for you? For your son?
14. How likely do you think it is that [SON'S NAME] will join the military? Why do you feel this way?

IF NOT PREVIOUSLY DISCUSSED:

What do you think the deciding factors might be?

What do you think he should accomplish before he makes this decision?

Does he have a preference for a particular branch of service? Do you? Other important adults in his life?

15. Is there anything else about your son's future that you think is important that we haven't talked about?
16. Speaking generally about your son's future, are there things that you think your son should be doing now to prepare for it that he's not doing?

IF NOT MENTIONED:

Does [son] have any special talents or needs that [affect/might affect] his future plans? Can you tell me about that?

F. Contextual Information

Now just a little background information:

17. Besides [SON'S NAME], how many other children have you raised? Are you raising?

IF MENTIONS OTHER CHILDREN:

Have any of your other children ever expressed an interest in the military? In what ways might their situations be different/similar from that of [focal son]?

18. Now, how do you describe your race/ethnicity?
19. What is your age and the occupations of any adults living in your household?
20. Finally, is there anything from your background or experiences we haven't talked about that you think has affected your approach to parenting or attitudes toward the military?

APPENDIX C

QUESTION-BY-QUESTION SPECIFICATIONS

1999 YATS IN-DEPTH PARENTS STUDY: INTERVIEW GUIDE

QUESTION BY QUESTION SPECIFICATIONS

NOTATION

The questionnaire and guide use a standardized notation whereby:

- **Bold** is used to identify the major topics or sections of the interview.
- CAPITALIZATION is used to identify instructions to the interviewer.
- Redlining is used to identify places where the interviewer needs to fill in information about the respondent before beginning the interview.

Also, we are using the word “parent” to refer to the primary adult caretaker or guardian of the focal youth.

A NOTE ABOUT THE INTERVIEW STYLE

Unlike structured interviews that seek responses that are short and easily coded, the purpose of this interview is to get parents to express their thoughts, opinions, perspectives and experiences in their own words and in ways that are meaningful to them.

Since we want to know what parents think, we need to be careful that we do not suggest answers or lead them down a particular path. The questions are intentionally broad to allow for a wide range of “correct” responses.

A very important job of interviewers is to listen to what the parents are saying, urge them to tell you more about their experiences or views, and how and why they have come to them. As the interview progresses, this information can be incorporated into the interview in ways that let the parent know you are interested in, and attentive to, what s/he is saying, and not merely running through a series of rote questions.

Examples of non-leading follow-up questions that encourage parents to expand their responses include:

- Can you tell me what you mean by...?
- Can you give me an example of when...?
- Can you tell me why you feel that way...?
- What has led you to...?
- How did you come to that view...?
- Tell me more about that...

Silence can be golden. The interview covers a broad range of topics that the parent may or may not have thought much about. Acknowledge this periodically and give them time to think about it and formulate a response. At times it may help to ask whether it would be helpful for you to repeat the question.

BEFORE EACH INTERVIEW

- Review the information on the Respondent Profile Sheet. Although you will not be using this information directly, indirectly it may provide important contextual information that you can listen for throughout the interview.
- Get in the mood. Mentally review the interview protocol and the purposes of the study before you make the call.
- Insert information about the parent and her or his son from the Respondent Profile Sheet into the appropriate places in the protocol. To facilitate preparation for the interview, these places are redlined in the protocol.
- Put a fresh tape in the recorder and test the equipment to make sure it is properly working. Have a pad of paper and pen on-hand.

Introductory Statement

The information in this statement is important. Interviewers are urged to become familiar with its content and practice saying it in a way that is professional, yet sounds natural and puts the parent at ease.

All interviews must be tape-recorded, since this provides the most accurate raw data for our analysis. From past experience, we expect that almost all the respondents will give us permission to tape the interview. When they refuse, however, we must respect their wishes. If their refusal appears “soft,” you might explain that tape-recording is important so that we can be absolutely sure that we get the exact words parents use to answer our questions. This is very important for analysis—when we bring together all the interviews and try to draw conclusions from them. Assure them that neither their name nor any other identifying information will be included on the tape. If the refusal persists, thank them kindly and tell them we won’t be able to continue.

Also, we learned from the pretest that it is a good idea to ask the respondent what s/he would like you to call her. This will enable you to personalize the conversation comfortably, when needed or desired.

A. Son’s Involvement in Education, Work, and Other Activities

Question 1

A major purpose of this set of questions is to get the parent’s perspectives about how his/her son spends his time—e.g., if he’s enrolled in school, the sort of academic or vocational program he’s in; if he’s employed, the type of work he does, how he spends his money, and what the parent thinks of it; if he’s not employed, whether he’s looking for work and, if so, the type of job he’s looking for and whether or not the parent is involved in encouraging him to work or in finding him a job; how the son spends his leisure time—when he’s not in school or working; and something about their son’s sociability—e.g., the sort of friends he has, his personality, special interests, and so on.

These questions are intentionally non-threatening. Another major purpose of this set of questions is to put the respondent at ease and set the stage for narrative responses. A common pitfall for interviewers is to resort to “fact finding” with a string of questions that yield yes/no or other

monosyllabic responses. We need them to talk, to explain, and to describe. Practice using open-ended questions. People really do like to talk about themselves and their situations when they're given the chance and have someone who is genuinely interested in listening.

Some parents may not know very much about what their sons do with their time. Accept this and gently extend an invitation for them to tell you about what they don't know—e.g., “You're not the first parent to tell me that... Can you tell me about that?” OR “Why do you think that's so?” OR “What are your thoughts about what he's doing?” In so doing, they may provide important information about the sons or their relationships with them (e.g., “he doesn't tell us anything,” “we aren't really on speaking terms,” “he talks to his father about that,” or “he's got a bad attitude and can't keep a job”).

As noted earlier, information on the Respondent Profile Form may provide useful cues about the parent or her/his son, but you must be prepared to go with the flow of whatever the parent tells you. Some may provide information that is not in synch with what their son has told us. When their son responded to the survey, we promised him confidentiality. For this reason, and others, we should not violate this promise. Again, our purpose is to get the independent perspectives of parents. Do not challenge them on “facts.”

B. Son's Approach to the Future

Questions 2, 3, 4

These questions explore the parent's perspectives about where she or he thinks the son is headed and what they think about it.

It's okay if parents say they don't know what their son's aspirations or future plans are. As elsewhere in the interview, let them know that it's all right and encourage them to talk about their impressions or what they think their son might be interested in pursuing.

Question 5

This question is designed to get parents to talk about where they think their son is headed. This includes their general feelings, for example, that he'll succeed at whatever he sets his mind to or won't get anywhere with his attitude TO their impressions of the sort of ideas, aspirations or future plans they think he might have.

In this question, we also want to explore the parent's perceptions of their son's talents or limitations—e.g., personal characteristics, family circumstances, health, etc.

Question 6

The purpose of this question is to get parent's perspectives on how they think their sons approach decision making. If they talk about the rituals their son goes through to pick out his clothes or how he does whatever his friends tell him to do, let them talk and listen to their responses. When they're finished, or if the question appears too abstract for them, ask for examples of decisions the son has made or is making and get them to talk about his approach in that context.

The follow-up remark is appropriate here and elsewhere throughout the interview. It is intended to assure parents that it's okay to think about the question before they respond.

C. Influences on Son

This set of questions urges parents to talk about factors they think influence (or have influenced) their son's thinking about, or approach to, the future. The questions are intentionally broad so that we can learn which influences parents think are important from their experiences or in their opinion. Eventually, we want to know how they view their roles in, or influence on, their son. However, we first want to see if they will offer this information on their own because they view themselves as influential.

Question 7

This question seeks to get the parents to identify people, events, experiences or information sources that they think influence, or have influenced, their son's life. Again, it's intentionally broad to allow for responses that best fit their experiences or knowledge of their sons. They may talk about influences on his personality, religiosity, dress, or other aspects of his life that are not directly vocational. Let them finish before you proceed with the follow-up questions.

If they do not mention how they think each source influenced their son's thinking or plans for his future, explore this with them. Also, if the parent does not talk about her/his role in, or influence on, the son's thinking or preparation for the future, explore their thoughts on this using the follow-up questions as your guide. This series of questions ask about their perceptions of their role or influence, including any advice they may have given them about what to do (or, e.g., watch out for) or what not to do AND how their sons respond to their efforts to influence or guide them. Parents may say they have little or no role or influence OR express dissatisfaction or discomfort with their role or level of influence. The last question is intended to explore what role she or he would like to play in the son's life.

Question 8

In the process of talking, ideas and thoughts become more focused and often respondents begin to make connections that had not occurred to them previously. For this reason, interviewers should get in the habit of asking—"Is there anything else you can tell me about..." Question 8 is included to remind interviewers to ask whether any other influences on their sons' thinking or behavior come to mind. You might preface the question with the sources of influence they have already described. For each additional source of influence they mention, explore the nature of the influence and what they think about it.

D. Images of the Military

A major purpose of this study is to deepen our understanding of parents' perceptions of the military and how they may influence their sons' views and propensity for joining. This set of questions is intended to explore parents' general images and impressions of the military and the sources of these images. In the next section (E), we will use this information to explore whether and how parents may communicate their images and impressions of the military to their sons.

Question 9

This is the broadest question in the section. The purpose is to understand what comes to parents' minds when they think about the military. It allows for the widest possible range of responses. For example, they may talk about how the mission of the military conflicts with their religious beliefs. It may conjure images of patriotism or protecting our way of life. And so on.

Also, it eliminates any bias we may introduce and, thereby, expands our opportunity to learn about the topic in ways that we could not have anticipated. Let the parent respond to the broad question. Listen to what they are telling you and then ask something like: "Is there anything else you can tell me about your images of, or opinions about, the military?"

Think about what the parent has told you. If they have not mentioned their opinions about the role the U.S. military plays in the world today, their images or impressions of people in the military, and their images or impressions of the military lifestyle, explore these topics through use of open-ended follow-up questions. On occasion, it may be necessary to rephrase the questions or offer them some sense of what we are fishing for. A common error is to begin asking questions about specific aspects of the military—for example, when trying to get their images or impressions of the military lifestyle, some interviewers resort to specific yes/no type questions about the strict discipline or opportunities to travel to distant lands. Avoid this tactic. Instead, rephrase the question for them. For example, ask instead: "What do you think life is like for people in the military?" This approach will yield more authentic and useful responses.

Question 10

This question is designed to get parents to talk about how their images and impressions of the military were formed. Listen. Think about their responses to Q.9. If there's a particularly strong or unique image or impression of the military that is not explained by their response, explore how they came to have it.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

As elsewhere, ask if there's anything else they can tell you about how they came to have these particular images or opinions of the military.

IF NOT MENTIONED:

The parent, his/her spouse, or other persons close to themselves or their sons may have served in the military. These questions explore these possible sources of information or opinions about the military and the ways that this exposure may have influenced their views of the military. The last question begins the transition to the next section of the protocol by asking whether and how any of the people mentioned may have influenced their son's interest in the military.

E. The Military as a Possible Destination for Son

The questions in this section shift the parents' attention back to their sons. The purpose is to explore whatever knowledge or hunches they may have about their sons' interest (or disinterest) in the military—past and present; and experiences or other factors that may affect their propensity to join. The parent may have talked about his or her son's interest in the military earlier in the interview. Rephrase the questions in a way that incorporates this information into your

conversations with individual parents. This will assure the parent that you have been listening to what s/he has said and motivate her/him to expand and clarify their responses.

Question 11

This question seeks to get the parents' perspective on their son's interest (or disinterest) in the military. The follow-up questions are written to help you help the parent articulate her or his impressions of their son's interest, the reasons why they think their son is interested or not interested, and what he has done, if anything, to get information about the military; as well as their opinions about the military as a possible destination for their son and how it might fit (or not fit) with their son's future goals or needs.

Question 12

This question is intended to tap into the parents' knowledge and opinions of any contacts their son may have had with ROTC, recruiters or other military outreach efforts. It begins with an open-ended question about their son's exposure to the military and follows up with questions about the nature of these interactions, the role they played, and their impressions of their son's reactions, as well as their own.

Parents may have already talked about some of these issues. Incorporate this information into your questions and explore further.

Questions 13-14

These questions are designed to tap parent perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of military service for their son, specific worries or preferences they would have were he to join, and the likelihood that he will join.

Questions 15-16

These questions provide parents with the opportunity to tell us things about their sons or their situations that they think are important or relevant, but we did not ask about. Do not rush through these questions. Give the parent time to reflect on their answers before you proceed.

F. Contextual Information

The questions in this section will provide us with important background information about the respondents and their family living situations. Please keep in mind that these are potentially sensitive questions. If a parent is reluctant to answer them, remind her or him that all data are confidential and will not be attached with any identifying information. If necessary, offer to turn the tape recorder off. Before doing so, however, sign-off with a message that you are turning it off. This will help us coordinate the transcription process. To the extent possible, write verbatim accounts of their answers. Turn your complete notes in with the interview tape so the information can be entered into the transcript.

G. END

Thank parent for her or his participation.

Turn off recorder & get parent's name and complete mailing address.

APPENDIX D

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

YATS Parents Study

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

What is the purpose of the study?/What's the interview about?

The United States Department of Defense is conducting this study to learn more about parent's views of the education, career plans, interests and attitudes of young people in this country.

[YOUTH] Why are you calling me again? I already answered your questions.

We're calling you back because we want to get your parent's thoughts about your career plans. We need you to help us contact your parent.

[PARENT] Why are you calling me? My son answered your questions.

We're calling you to find out about your thoughts and opinions about your son's career plans and interests in more detail from your perspective.

What kind of questions will you be asking?

We are asking questions about parent's perspectives on the career plans, interests, and attitudes of young adults.

Who do you work for?

I work for Westat, a social science research firm in the Washington, DC area, and we have been contracted by the Department of Defense to conduct this study. I am calling from the office in Rockville, Maryland.

How do I know you will keep the information confidential?/How will the results be published?

We are required by law not to reveal any information other than to persons directly involved with the study. No information that would permit the identification of any individual will be released or published.

Do I have to give you my parent's name?

No, but their input and opinions are very important to the success of this study. You and your parent represent a lot of other respondents in situations similar to yours, and you are actually speaking for them, as well as yourself.

Do I still get \$5 if my parent doesn't do the interview?

Yes, you will receive \$5 for helping us out.

Do I have to do the interview?/Do I have to answer your questions?

Of course it is not mandatory that you answer our questions, but your input and opinions are very important to the success of this study. You represent a lot of other respondents in situations similar to yours, and you are actually speaking for them, as well as yourself.

How will the study results be used?/What will you do with this information?

The results will be used for the development of important policy decisions.

Can I get a copy of the results?

Yes. However, the results of the study will not be available for several months. I'd be happy to take your name and address. We can then send you a summary of the results when they are available. *(Write the respondent's name and address on a YATS In-Depth Interviews Address Form and give the sheet to your supervisor.)*

How long will the interview take?

The amount of time varies from person to person but it averages about 45 minutes. We can conduct the interview at a time that is most convenient for you.

I'm not going to answer a lot of questions over the phone!

Most people find the questions interesting. In addition, if there are any questions in particular that you don't want to answer, just tell the interviewer and they will skip over them.

I think this whole business is stupid. The money for this study could be spent more wisely, etc.

Occasionally you will encounter an argumentative respondent. In spite of their argumentative response, they tend to be persons who are really interested in the study, but want to tell what they feel before they will consent to be interviewed. Bear with them and hear them out! As long as they keep talking, they have not refused. Do not argue; simply make short, neutral comments to let them know you are listening. When they have finished, make a comment such as:

Your opinions are very interesting and your answers will be important for the study. This is your opportunity to be heard.

I had a bad experience recently with someone conducting an interview, so I don't think I want to participate.

I'm sorry that your experience was a bad one. However, this is an important research effort authorized by the Department of Defense and we hope to make your contact with us a pleasant one. By participating in this study, you will help the Department of Defense learn more about parent's perspectives on the futures of American young people. This is your chance to be heard.

Questions About Selection of Phone Number/Household/Respondent

Why don't you call someone else/another number?

It is important that we talk with you/your parent because the procedures used to select you/your parent do not allow us to replace you with another person. You represent a larger group of people in similar circumstances. Your answers cannot be replaced by someone else's. If we exclude you/your parent, we would not get an accurate picture of the opinions of American parents.

[YOUTH] How did you get my phone number?/How did you get my unlisted number?

We got your phone number from the results of the other study. In the other study, your number was randomly selected by a computer from among all of the possible telephone numbers in your area. We do not use telephone directories. (Your number is still unlisted.)

[YOUTH] I don't live with my parents. I live at school/on my own.

We're still interested in speaking with your parent. So please refer to your parent's or family home, or the home where you grew up, as you help me to identify the adult we would like to interview.

[YOUTH] I don't have a (mother/father/parent).

We understand that some young people do not have or live with mothers and fathers. We actually have procedures to identify another adult we would like to interview. If you could just answer a few more questions for me, I would really appreciate it.

[PARENT] How did you get my phone number?/How did you get my unlisted number?

We got your phone number from your son. He participated in a study we conducted a few months ago about the military and about career plans. (Your number is still unlisted.)

Questions That Refer to Telemarketing/Calling List

Please remove my name from your calling lists/You can not call me according to the "No Call" law.

I am not trying to sell you anything. I understand that you might think I work for a telemarketing company however, the telephone calls we make are not prohibited or regulated by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). Our aim is to have you participate in our study, not to sell you anything. The information you give us will be used exclusively for research purposes.

I want you to add my name to your "do not call" list/If you call me again it will cost you \$500.00.

I am not trying to sell you anything. The Telemarketing law, you are referring to, has provisions that require a "do not call" policy. We are not a telemarketing company and there is no federal law that prohibits telephone calls to conduct social science research.

You can't call me at this time/You can't call me before 8:00 am or after 9:00 pm (or before 10:00 am on weekends).

I am not trying to sell you anything. The telemarketing laws you are referring to do have provisions that restrict the time of day they may make unsolicited telephone calls for sales purposes. Our phone calls are not prohibited, our aim is to have you participate in our study.

Questions About the Legitimacy of the Survey

What is the authority/sponsor for this study?

The U.S. Department of Defense has contracted Westat to collect this information. It is authorized by Congress in 10 U.S. Code 2358, Research Projects.

Who can I call at the Department of Defense to verify this study?

You may call Dr. Jerry Lehnus at the Defense Manpower Data Center at (703) 696-7401. Please be aware that this is not a toll-free call.

How do I know the survey is legitimate?/How do I know that you are really an interviewer for this survey?

If you wish, I can give you a toll-free 800 number to call my supervisor. (*Give Westat toll-free number, 1-800-251-1500, the study name, YATS study, and the project director's name, Dr. Mary Achatz.*)

Does this survey have approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)/What is the OMB number?

Yes, the OMB number is 0704-0069.

APPENDIX E

TRC INTERVIEWER SCREENER

YATS Parents Study

TRC Interviewer Screener

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Hello, my name is (NAME) and I'm calling from Westat on behalf of the Department of Defense. Is (YOUTH) available?

Several months ago, we conducted a survey about the military and career plans of today's youth. We're calling back some of the young people we surveyed to speak with them again.

IF YES, CONTINUE.

IF NO, ARRANGE FOR CALLBACK FOR YOUTH.

{Hello, my name is (NAME) and I'm calling from Westat on behalf of the Department of Defense. Several months ago, we conducted a survey about the military and about career plans. We're calling back some of the young people we surveyed to speak with them again.}

The reason we are calling back is to talk with parents or guardians about young people's career choices and future plans. We would like to speak with one of your parents about your future plans. The purpose of this interview is not for us to talk to your parents about what you said your plans are, but for your parents to tell us about your future plans.

The interview with your parent will take about 45 minutes, and we'll send him or her \$20 for completing the interview. We'll also send you \$5 for helping us.

What I would like to do now is talk to your (father/mother). Is (he/she) available?

IF YES, CONTINUE WITH **PARENT INTRODUCTION** WITH PARENT.

IF NO, ARRANGE CALLBACK FOR PARENT.

(BE SURE TO RECORD PARENT'S NAME AND PHONE WHERE HE/SHE CAN BE REACHED)

IF NO FATHER/MOTHER GO TO PARENT FIGURE 1.

IF THERE IS A FATHER/MOTHER BUT HE/SHE IS TOO SICK OR UNABLE TO COMPLETE THE INTERVIEW GO TO **PARENT 2**.

IF THERE IS A FATHER/MOTHER BUT HE/SHE DOES NOT RESIDE IN THE HH, PROBE:
Do you see or talk with your (dad/mom)? How often do you see or speak to (him/her)? Did (he/she) participate in raising you?

IF THE YOUTH HAS A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER/MOTHER:

I'd like to talk to (him/her). Is (he/she) available?

IF YES, CONTINUE WITH **PARENT INTRODUCTION** WITH THAT PERSON.

IF NO, ARRANGE CALLBACK FOR THAT PERSON.

(BE SURE TO RECORD PERSON'S NAME, RELATIONSHIP TO YOUTH, AND
PHONE WHERE HE/SHE CAN BE REACHED)

IF THERE IS NO RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE YOUTH AND THE FATHER/MOTHER,
GO TO **PARENT FIGURE 1**.

PARENT FIGURE 1:

We're not just interested in talking to mothers and fathers, but also to other adults that young people talk to about their futures. This could be a stepparent, grandparent, other relative, or friend of the family. Is there some other (man/woman) who participated in raising you?

IF YES, CONTINUE.

IF NO FATHER/MOTHER FIGURE GO TO **PARENT 2**.

I'd like to talk to (him/her). Is (he/she) available?

IF YES, CONTINUE WITH **PARENT INTRODUCTION** WITH THAT PERSON.

IF NO, ARRANGE CALLBACK FOR THAT PERSON.

(BE SURE TO RECORD PERSON'S NAME, RELATIONSHIP TO YOUTH, AND PHONE WHERE HE/SHE CAN BE REACHED)

PARENT 2:

Well, I'd like to talk to your (father/mother) then. Is (he/she) available?

IF YES, CONTINUE WITH **PARENT INTRODUCTION** WITH PARENT.

IF NO, ARRANGE CALLBACK FOR PARENT.

(BE SURE TO RECORD PARENT'S NAME AND PHONE WHERE HE/SHE CAN BE REACHED)

IF NO PARENT 2 GO TO **PARENT FIGURE 2**.

PARENT FIGURE 2:

Well, is there some other (man/woman) who participated in raising you?

IF YES, CONTINUE.

IF NO, THANK RESPONDENT AND CODE IE.

I'd like to talk (him/her). Is (he/she) available?

IF YES, CONTINUE WITH **PARENT INTRODUCTION** WITH THAT PERSON.

IF NO, ARRANGE CALLBACK FOR THAT PERSON.

(BE SURE TO RECORD PERSON'S NAME, RELATIONSHIP TO YOUTH, AND PHONE WHERE HE/SHE CAN BE REACHED)

PARENT INTRODUCTION:

{Hello, may I speak to (PARENT/GUARDIAN)}

Hello, my name is (NAME) and I'm calling from Westat on behalf of the Department of Defense. Several months ago, (YOUTH) responded to a survey that asked his opinions about the military and about his career plans. Now we're talking to the parents and guardians of youth. We'd like to find a convenient time when we can get your thoughts and opinions about young people's career choices. The interview will take about 45 minutes and for your participation, we'll send you \$20 after you complete the interview. [(YOUTH) will be sent \$5 for helping us out.]

I would like to schedule a time for an interviewer to call you. It is very important that we schedule the appointment at a time when you will be able to keep the appointment. Could we schedule the interview for (DATE/TIME)?

BE MINDFUL OF TIME ZONE CONVERSIONS. ALL APPOINTMENTS LISTED ON CALL RECORD SHOULD BE IN EDT.

APPENDIX F

CALL RECORDS

APPENDIX G

RESPONDENT PROFILE FORM

RESPONDENT PROFILE FORM

GENERAL INFORMATION

CASE ID	«CASEID»		School Status	«SCHSTS»
Subject	«FNAME»		Type of HS program	«Q701»
Phone Number	«PHONE1» «PHONE2»		Grades usually received in HS	«Q700»
State	«STATE»		Plans after HS or in the next few years	«Q438A» «Q438B» «Q438C»
Propensity	«PGRP»		If plans include working, what kind of job?	«Q419B»
Age	«CALCAGE»		If plans include school, what kind of school?	«Q411»
Race/Ethnicity	«RACETH»		Child of Veteran?	«MILPRNT»
Employment Status	«VEMPSTAT»		Father's Education	«Q713A»
Difficulty in getting a F/T job in R's community	«Q436»		Mother's Education	«Q713B»

PROPENSITY			
How likely is it that R will be serving in the military in the next few years?		«Q503»	
How likely is it that R will be serving in the ...		«Q525»	
Army	«Q510»	Marine Corps	«Q512»
Navy	«Q513»	Air Force	«Q511»
Before YATS interview, had R ever considered joining the military?		«Q525»	
Main reasons R would consider joining		«Q526A1» «Q526A2» «Q526A3»	
Main reasons R would not consider joining		«Q530A1» «Q530A2» «Q530A3»	
Has R's interest increased or decreased?		«Q532»	
Reasons it increased		«Q534A1» «Q534A2» «Q534A3»	
Reasons it decreased		«Q536A1» «Q536A2» «Q536A3»	

INFLUENCES			
Did R ever talk to a military recruiter?			«RECRUIT»
Which Service's recruiters?	«Q629A1» «Q629A2»		
In past year, has R talked to anyone other than a recruiter about serving in the military?			«Q644E»
With whom did the R discuss this? Was it his...?		Has he/she ever been in the military?	How would he/she feel about R serving?
Father	«V644GDAD» »	«MILDAD»	«Q644NDAD»
Mother	«V644GMOM» »	«MILMOM»	«Q644NMOM»
Brother	«V644GSIB»	«MILBRO»	
Sister	«V644GSIS»	«MILSIS»	
Friend-same generation	«V644GSAM» »	«MILFRD»	«Q644NSAM»

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interview Summary Form
1999 YATS In-depth Interviews
With Parents

Please complete this summary form as soon as possible after the interview.

Name of Respondent:

CASE ID:

Date of Interview:

- S1.** Summarize your overall impressions of the parent interview.
- S2.** In a nutshell, how does the parent describe her or his son's approach to decision-making generally and, more specifically, career decision-making?
- S3.** How does the parent describe major influences on son's thinking about or approach to his future?
- S4.** How does the parent describe her or his role or influence in son's career decisions or approach to the future?
- S5.** What images does the parent have of the military? How were these images formed? What images, opinions or information about the military has the parent communicated—directly or indirectly—to her or his son? To what effect?
- S6.** Comment briefly on anything else you found particularly interesting or noteworthy about the parent or the interview that may help us interpret the responses.